

Dorian Blair in the uniform of an officer of the Tsar's Flying Corps, in which he was given a special commission to enable him to discover whether Rasputin was using his position at Court to assist the Germans.

12485

RUSSIAN HAZARD^D

*The Adventures of a British Secret
Service Agent in Russia*

By
DORIAN BLAIR
and
C. H. DAND

ILLUSTRATED



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SPEAKING of the secret-service work performed for all countries during the war, an Englishman who took part in it and was decorated by his grateful country recently said : "There are a score of other names in this silent service to which I once belonged who could tell of tasks done and obstacles overcome which would read like fairy-stories and yet contain not a syllable of exaggeration."

This is one of these twenty "fairy-stories" now being told after twenty years.

For those who care to know, Mr. Blair is now engaged in more prosaic business in the Midlands in the intervals of grappling with the ill-health which has been *his* reward for the "tasks done and obstacles overcome".

C. H. DAND.

February 1937.

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PART ONE

THE BODY OF RASPUȚIN

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CHAPTER I

A LADY WITH THE FACE OF TOMORROW

I DIDN'T want to be a spy.

I didn't want to go to Russia.

I had other plans for my life altogether.

The story of how it all came about begins in Hull, in the month of August 1914. My friend Holly and I had just climbed into bed when we heard the newsboys in the street shouting to tell us that war between England and Germany had begun. We had rushed into the street in our dressing-gowns to buy the paper and spent most of the rest of the night discussing what we should do. Eventually we had decided to join the Legion of Frontiersmen because we liked their blue uniforms and that touch of bright-looking chain mail they wear upon their shoulders, the chain most of all. We had been accepted and given a solemn assurance that, wherever the fighting was thickest, there should we be. So we had ordered our uniforms and gone back to our jobs to devour the papers and speak of nothing but our coming glorious days. But before I had time for even the first fitting of my blue uniform I received a letter adorned with several seals from the Russian Consul in Hull. It asked me to be good enough to call on him at his office, where he would put a suggestion to me with which he hoped I would agree. I called with rather bad grace, because I had a foreboding of what it might be.

Actually it was an old grievance of mine which this letter from the Russian Consul was threatening to raise. I had been born in St. Petersburg twenty-one years before. My father was a Scot, my mother a Slav. But from my earliest years I had hated the Russian in me and nursed my Britishness with holy joy. I had a Union Jack and a coloured portrait of King Edward VII on my bedroom wall, and I solemnly saluted both of them every morning as soon as I rose. It was a little Britain my father and I had built off from Russia within our four walls, but my bedroom was its citadel, and at the age of sixteen I had gladly come home to complete my education in Britain and was ready to knock the head off anyone who should

dare to think me a foreigner. For five years at school and technical college I had exulted in becoming more and more British every day, and now, in the hour of Britain's greatest need, when patriotism was at its height and I had been glad to be a Briton and do my British bit, I was afraid Russia, in the meanest fashion, was about to step in and exercise a claim.

My foreboding was more or less correct. The Consul wanted me to go to Russia, to Archangel. I was to become supercargo of a small steamer, the *Odessa*, then lying in Hull docks, to take charge of money which I was to hand over to the local treasurer at Archangel, and after that to go on to St. Petersburg with an envelope of documents addressed to various people, including an important person at the Imperial Court. I told him I couldn't go. I said I was already half-way to the front. He replied that he was offering me a mission of considerable importance to the Allied cause. There were other jobs just as vital as fighting to be done in a war, he said, and tried to flatter me that he must have a trustworthy man.

"But there are thousands of trustworthy men, even in Hull," I replied, with what I intended to be sarcasm but which probably seemed to him nothing but petulance. "Why in all the world must you want me to go? Any errand boy would do."

He looked at me sadly.

"Have you no duty to Russia?"

"No!" I shouted. "No! I'm British, Mr. Consul, not Russian. Russia has no claim on me. I want to fight for my own country, the country of my father and grandfather, the country I really belong to. Russia means nothing to me."

He raised his eyebrows.

"You can deny so completely your mother's country, the country where you were born, where you lived for so many years? Have you no friends there, no happy recollections?"

"Yes, Mr. Consul," I pleaded, "but that's all past and over for me. Really, I don't want to go back to Russia. I want to fight for Britain."

He was too clever for me. He became furiously angry.

"Is Russia not Britain's ally? Is Russia to be left to fight her battles alone? Has Russia no call on the services of patriotic Englishmen? What would you say to a Russian who was asked by Britain to undertake a mission of the utmost importance to her conduct of the war and who refused because he did not like Britain? What would you say to him if Britain had been the country that had really fed and clothed him?"

He had won. I hummed and hawed and snorted and argued, but he wore me down. I agreed to take his money and his papers

to Russia, but I did it with a distinct grudge and thought him as stupid* and irritating as my mother had been when she used to insist on my going some trifling errand for her when all my schoolboy pals were waiting for me with an important football match to play.

"When?" I asked. I wanted it over and done with.

He said I must go on board the ship that night. There were German submarines lying about somewhere outside the port and we had to wait word from the Admiralty that the coast was clear. The ship had to be ready to sail at any moment, so I must be on board. I packed my kit and mooned about in a cold rage on board the *Odessa* in Hull harbour for the next fourteen days.

I wasn't a bit flattered at being chosen by the Consul for his mission. I had no expectations that I would meet with any adventures on the trip or in Russia. It was not for my muscles that I had been selected or my daring or for anything that befits a young man. I had been picked out simply because I spoke Russian and knew Russia, and any old moujik would have done equally well. I kicked my way sullenly round the ship, talked war with the captain (a burly fellow with the face of a sea-lion whose whiskers had been shaved off), engines with the engineer, and football with the steward, and all in a mood of black despair. Each day I told myself that if we had not sailed by the next morning I would slip ashore and write a letter to the Consul telling him to find someone else, someone who did not mind running stupid errands for his mother while his friends were getting ready to play football on the Marne. But each evening the captain came from visiting the local Admiralty authorities with a promise that by next day at noon we should certainly have sailed, and each evening I was prevailed upon to wait. So I went on waiting and cursing. Then on the thirteenth day Madame M——* came aboard, and next night we sailed.

There was no connection between her coming and our going. But I must admit it was her arrival on board that kept me from running away that thirteenth night.

She was an actress, a Russian Jewess, on her way from New York to St. Petersburg, and in a hurry, she said, to get to Russia before the war would be over. We all believed this war would be a matter of weeks, at the most three months. I guessed her to be about thirty-five. She was of medium height, had olive skin, dark hair, and lively black eyes. When I first saw her she was wearing a flat, pancake kind of hat and a rather unbecoming long coat, half cloak. She was tired and irritable, and I had the misfortune to get in her path, receiving for reward a remark which I considered quite

* Now the wife of a high official in the Soviet service.

unnecessarily rude. So I merely concluded I was to have an uncongenial travelling companion in addition to my other disgusts with this journey, and when I met her again I did my best to steer well out of her way. But to my surprise she swept right up to me and charmingly apologized. Then I saw that in addition to those lively eyes she had a sad, sweet smile.

In the first five minutes over the ship's dinner I had told her all the reason of my gloom, and in the next five minutes she had told me the cardinal thing there was to know about herself.

She made no bones about it. Madame M—— was a Russian revolutionary. Her eagerness to reach Russia quickly was due entirely to her anxiety to be able to take part in the revolution which she was certain would break out there as soon as the war was at an end.

She went on to assure me that she was no mere Liberal reformist or a bomb-throwing Social Revolutionary, but an out-and-out Marxist, a follower of some individual called Lenin and his Bolshevik section of the Social Democratic Party. I hurriedly informed her that I had no interest whatever in Russian politics. After that the conversation flagged, her tiredness seemed to return, and she excused herself and retired to her cabin as soon as the meal was over. But she left me in a complete flummox. It had been a bit of a shock to have a beautiful woman, to whom one was beginning to feel friendly and warm in shy anticipation of enjoying her company for the rest of a lonely and perhaps disagreeable voyage, suddenly turn round and announce herself as something so utterly absurd but also so awe-inspiring as a Russian revolutionary! The declaration had been made so simply and forthrightly that it was out of character. All the revolutionaries I had ever read of had been secretive and heavily disguised. She had no right to be going about in this open way. I gravely wondered if she was not perhaps insane. Who was this Lenin I had never heard of and his mysterious "Bolshevik section of the S.D.P."? Could this mean anything to the war? I didn't give a damn for Russia except as an ally of Britain, but if these Russian revolutionaries were going to be so stupid and unpatriotic as to make trouble at this juncture by throwing bombs all over the place, perhaps killing the Grand Duke Nicholas or the Tsar, they might do some serious damage to the Allied cause. It wasn't right. Somebody should do something about it. Unfortunately, I wasn't sure what. When the captain returned from his nightly conference with the naval authorities, I told him what I had learned and asked his advice.

He seemed much less impressed than I was, and apparently thought all Russian revolutionaries very small beer indeed. Event-

ually he decided it was a matter for the authorities at Archangel when she tried to land, and had nothing to do with him. That night we sailed. For the next few hours my thoughts were too busy with the danger of submarines to give any further attention to the problem of Madame M——, but when I woke up late the next day and found we were still afloat I tried to remember all I knew of Russian politics so that I might be able to continue our conversation a little more intelligently when we should meet.

I could not, of course, have lived in Russia in the first decade of this century, even as a small schoolboy, without knowing something of revolution and the uneasy, tortured state the country of my birth seemed perpetually to be in. My first instruction in Russian politics had been a curious but perhaps practical one given me by my father in the shadow of the tall monument to Alexander I at the end of the Grand Morskaya in St. Petersburg's West End. Opposite the monument is a very beautiful arch connecting the wings of a great block of Government buildings. It was there he began. Later I heard him repeat the same story several times to visiting English friends, so I got to know it well.

"Observe that arch," he would say, "see its perfect proportions, how light it is ; it almost seems to fly. See the beauty of the chariot and horses which surmount it. Only in France can you find modern sculpture to compare with it in its delicacy of execution and sublimity of design. That is beauty, the cultivated face of this land of the Tsars. It is something you have to reckon with in the Russian, this reverence for art. On either side you have magnificent buildings, magnificent without, rotten with bureaucratic ignorance, stupidity, and corruption within. Now see the monument itself. It is one hundred feet high and said to be made from a single block of granite. The Russians boast that it is unique. There you have Russia again, its uniqueness, its power, its size. On the top you see a bronze angel. One hand holds a cross, the other points to the sky. The Russians are a religious people and mystical. Hence the cross and the pointing to the sky. The man to whom it was erected was a great Tsar who overcame Napoleon, but he died in Siberia, to which he had retired to be a recluse and a monk. It is probably only popular gossip that he died in Siberia, but that's Russia again. When his son, Nicholas I, came to the throne, there was some support for his brother Constantine, who was supposed to be in favour of giving the country constitutional government. Part of the army revolted in this square and were told by their officers to shout, 'Constantine and Constitution !' They thought Constitution was the name of Constantine's wife. That's Russia again. Then the Tsar sent out his loyal soldiers to shoot them down. They didn't know why they

were shooting at their friends but they obeyed the Tsar's order and shot so well that many of their comrades were killed. And that's Russia even in the present day."

After which he regularly took us to see the bullet-marks on the buildings across the street.

My own recollections of politics in St. Petersburg included seeing men and women cursing and screaming as they ran from charging Cossack horses and of hearing the volleys with which the Tsar's guardsmen met the deputations of workmen who came to put before him the case for their being allowed some protection from the misgovernment of his ministers and officials by being given a small say in the ordering of their own lives. That had been in 1905, when Father Gapon was the workmen's leader. The whole country had been wildly agitating for months for the same demand. Even the students had come out on strike, and I had marched out with them. We knew well enough what we were marching for. Until my father discovered it and locked me up at home, I had been the school revolutionary mascot. Had I not an English name and English blood, and were we not striking to draw the attention of the Tsar to the fact that his Russian children wanted the same freedom as the children of the King of England enjoyed? The peasants had set fire to the landowners' houses in pursuit of their ideal and danced round them while they burned. The sailors of the battleship *Potemkin* had revolted and murdered their officers. The whole of St. Petersburg had gone on strike. We had no electric light, no trains, no trams, no newspapers. Everybody had been in it, from the doctors and lawyers to the men who cleaned the streets. I remembered with what rejoicings we had received the Tsar's grudging concession of a Duma, and how quickly we had learned that the concession had been little more than a trick. Stolypin, the Tsar's minister, marked the end of the agitation with six hundred executions.

There were other things, of course. I remembered when the Grand Duke Sergius, the Tsar's uncle, had been blown to pieces by a bomb in Moscow, and how, when the guns of the fortress of Peter and Paul were being fired in celebration of some religious festival, a live shot had fallen on the Winter Palace perilously near the Tsar. I also knew the Grand Duke had been a brute. "A land of angels and savages, children and beasts", my father had been used to call Russia, and he complained that you could never forecast with certainty in what category any Russian would appear in a given set of circumstances. All of this had been of great service, of course, in throwing me back in relief to my worship of the Union Jack. But I was a little doubtful how far it was going to carry me in my conversational efforts with Madame M——.

For the seventeen days our voyage lasted I sat respectfully at the feet of Madame M——, and under her tuition tried desperately to become better acquainted with the teachings of her Karl Marx. I listened to her talk on deck. I struggled with *Das Kapital*, which she lent me, in my cabin. Meanwhile our ship was zigzagging its way across the North Sea and up the map towards the Arctic, feverishly dodging a raiding German fleet which we subsequently learned had never left Kiel. But these alarms provided an atmosphere which combined with the fact that I was receiving my instruction from the lips of a fascinating woman to make Karl Marx seem an impossible fantasy, something which Bernard Shaw, in a bad dream, might have composed. Like most Russians, Madame M—— loved to lie late in the morning and talk far into the night. Consequently we were often deep in a discussion in a corner of the deck—at least, she would be talking in her hoarse, earnest tones, I listening as usual with less than half my mind on the words she was saying and the rest of it playing idly with the thoughts roused by her woman's voice or wondering what Holly was doing in his blue and chain-mail uniform. Suddenly the nervous look-out in the bows would imagine he was hearing something ahead, and the ship would be stopped completely while each of us strained his ears in the pale August night and mistook his own heart-beats for the sound of danger. Madame M—— had a supreme contempt for these occasions and would go on talking smoothly of production for use and not for profit. Her voice would float over the whole ship in the dead, expectant silence. Angrily the captain would shout down from the bridge in his cracked Russian for her to be silent.

"You there, woman, keep shut your —— mouth ! S-s-sh !"

Suddenly remembering that he was making more noise than she, he invariably ended his reproof with a hiss as loud as his own ship's steam blowing off. All would be quiet for half a minute until Madame M—— would lose patience with the waiting and start off again on her earnest explanation to me of the part played by labour in the creation of value. When she at last went below the captain would come to me and complain excitedly that he half believed that damned woman wanted to sink the ship.

I had some reason to wonder the same myself. I got a shock when she informed me that she was on her way to Russia actually to work for her own country's defeat. I protested vigorously. It was shameful, unpatriotic, I said. She scorned my ideas of patriotism. Patriotism had nothing to do with the people. The war was the creation of the capitalists and their governments, according to her. Defeat meant the overthrow of governments and was the opportunity of the peoples to rise against their oppressors and establish

their own regime—Communism. Above all, it was the opportunity of the Russian people. Whatever other peoples might do, whatever the outcome for the rest of the Allies and the world, the Russian people must be shown the way to use the war to make themselves free. I was appalled at the suggestion. I was even more appalled when she blandly declared that she wanted to use our companionship on this voyage to try to make a convert of me. My consolation was that she had failed so miserably with me. The Russians were a queer people. But I had a shrewd idea what picturesque expressions a Russian peasant would soon find for any woman, however charming, who came and talked to him like that. Whatever roused him against his oppressors, I comforted myself, it would not be this siren prosily wooing him with Karl Marx.

At last the voyage was over. No submarines accosted us. We floated on in a dream voyage through the seas of the Midnight Sun, round the North Cape, and into the White Sea. The captain congratulated himself on his first voyage of the war. I looked forward to getting my business over quickly and speeding back to my uniform if the war should still be on. Madame M—— spent hours gazing at the distant shores of Russia, presumably dreaming of the revolution to come. The captain meaningly touched his head to me, and I smiled.

We glided gently into the harbour at Archangel. Now I could say good-bye, even good luck, to Madame M—— and begin my race through my mission and back home. I had learned from a passing fisherman that the war was still on, and that was all I wanted to know.

CHAPTER II

I BECOME AN AMATEUR SPY

I REPEAT—I didn't want to be a spy.

I found Archangel a refreshing contrast after my five weeks aboard ship. With the closing of the Baltic by the Germans it had suddenly become of immense importance to the Allies. There were only two ports in the whole Russian Empire to which the Allies could send the vast stores needed for war, Archangel and Vladivostok, and the latter was on the other side of the world and eight thousand miles away from the front. Archangel was two thousand miles from where the fighting was going on, and the only connection for more than a third of the way was a single-track railway-line. Worse than that, in another few weeks Archangel itself would be cut off from the outer world by a barrier of ice. There was every need for haste, therefore, and the citizens seemed positively to be falling over one another in their enthusiasm to get something done. It did not take long to discover, however, that nobody seemed very clear what had to be done.

The first thing I did on landing was to find out what had happened to the war while I had been at sea. Most of the Russians I met were fairly pleased with themselves and the war as it had gone with them up to that moment. News of a great battle on the Austrian front at Rawa Ruska had just come to Archangel. Generals Brusiloff and Ruzsky had advanced well into Galicia, and the Austrians were in complete rout. The Russians were driving the enemy before them like frightened sheep with their sharp lances and bayonets. It was true there were dark rumours reaching even Archangel of a grave set-back to the bold invasion of the marshes of East Prussia which General Samsonoff had undertaken. It seemed the Russians had not been given a chance to use their famous bayonets, and the Germans had hurled vast quantities of shell at them, forcing them to retreat by sheer weight of heavy arms. The rumours went so far as to say that Samsonoff, something of an army hero, was missing. But everybody in Archangel was sure that the Grand Duke Nicholas, the supreme Commander-in-Chief, would have the situation well in hand. The Governor's office had information that this East Prussian adventure had never been intended as a serious movement,

but had been initiated as a heroic gesture to scare the Germans, to force them to withdraw troops and guns from France and save threatened Paris. Many lives had been lost, no doubt, but the Russians were proud to have been able to save their Allies, even at serious cost to themselves. So much I learned at the Governor's office, and I was secretly a little relieved, after my conversations with Madame M——, to find Archangel so imbued with the spirit of victory. I hadn't been dead sure about the Russians. They were a funny people. I was also pleased to learn that there was every likelihood of the war on the western front lasting some time and giving me a chance to get back to take part in it. In fact, the Russians I met were asking me when the French and British were going to begin.

I clumped my way energetically along the wooden duck-boards, which did duty in Archangel for pavements—the mud was so deep in the streets that the peasants' ponies waded more than knee-high in it and sank to their bellies in the pools of water which collected in the middle—visiting the shipping offices with which I had to do business, eager to get it over and be off to St. Petersburg, or Petrograd as everyone was now patriotically trying to remember to call it. In the office of Baron Steiger, Archangel head of the Russian Volunteer Fleet, I heard an echo of Madame M——. A ship belonging to the Volunteer Fleet, the *Moscow*, had just come in from New York with a crowd of Russians returning to take their places in the forces. The captain was complaining that they were nothing but a pack of revolutionaries, and that if he had his way he would lock the lot of them up before they had time to do any harm. But Baron Steiger did not seem to take the matter very seriously, and I concluded that he must be of the same way of thinking as myself about these Marxians. I was surprised at the number of people of German name and obvious German extraction I had to deal with in the shipping offices, but put it down to the fact that the Russian mercantile marine had always been recruited largely from the Baltic provinces, where the educated classes were mostly of German origin. They seemed just as eager as the native Russians to do their bit, but even more perplexed than the Russians as to how to do it. This was curious. One would have expected their German blood to have made them better organizers. Nobody knew anything about a return cargo for the *Odessa*. In despair I sought out a Scots captain who held an important post in shipping circles in Archangel, and who, one of the Russian shippers had suggested, might help me.

I told him of my difficulties. He heard me through and nodded gravely.

"I'm going to tell you something serious, lad. Maybe this war will be won by these fighting lads in Flanders, but it'll be lost by leaving the Russians to their own resources unless we do something quick about it."

I laughed at his glum pessimism. I reminded him of what I had heard that same morning of the victories in Galicia. I said the Russians were easily a match for the Germans and Austrians. It would be a walk-over for the Russian steam-roller as soon as Russia had her man-power fully mobilized. He interrupted me with an impatient gesture.

"This war isn't going to be won by men. It's going to be won by guns—guns and shells and boats and railway-trains. Why do you think the Russians are sending the Austrians flying in Galicia? Because it's man to man there. The Austrians haven't got guns. Why do you think the Germans are driving the Russians back from East Prussia? Because it isn't man to man there. It's gun to gun and shell to shell. And the Russians haven't got either. How many heavy field-guns do you think they've got in the whole Russian Army? Less than a hundred. Their light artillery is a lot of pop-guns compared with the Germans'. And even if they had the guns they've got precious little to fire out of them. At the rate the Germans are shooting, the Russians will be out of ammunition in a couple of months. And stores? What about lead and copper and aluminium and rubber and coal? Where's it all coming from if they're going to make their own munitions?"

He stopped for breath, and I tried to interrupt.

He brushed my remark aside. "It's ships, man, ships. We've got to supply them with the things they haven't got if they're not to be allowed to let us down."

"But——"

He interrupted me again.

"Let's talk sense. You've been round these fellows in the different shipping offices here. You see what kind of helpless cattle they are. There's no organization. They don't know in what direction to turn. And that's not the worst of it. Did you see how many Germans there are?"

I murmured my theory about the Baltic provinces.

"Yes!" he shouted. "And do you think the Germans in the Baltic provinces have any cause to love the Russians? Why, the Russian police used to bribe the Letts to burn the German land-owners' houses down. Maybe they won't fight for the Germans. But they damn' well won't fight for the Russians or do anything else for them if they can help it. It's the same in Petrograd. The capital's riddled with German sympathy. And these pro-German

fellows own all the boats, and we're going to be dependent on them for carrying the supplies with which we'll have to help Russia win the war. That's why you can't get your return cargo for England. It's sabotage, man, plain sabotage. Oh, it's a lovely situation !”

He walked over to the window and looked out on to the pine woods which sweep so gloriously right down to the water's edge at Archangel.

Probably there was something in what he said, though I put him down as the sort of man whose bonnet would easily harbour a bee. If things were as bad as he said they were, why didn't he write to the British Prime Minister about it or to the *Daily Mail*? That was the way to get things done. But probably there was nothing in it at all. Russia was pretty hopeless in many ways, but it should be able to make a fair job of getting on with a war.

“Well, what is there to do about it?” I asked.

He sat down at his desk again.

“Maybe you wonder why I'm talking to you like this,” he went on in his broad Scots accent. “Maybe you wonder what Russian guns and all the like of that have to do with me. It's true I've been working here in Russia as a business man. But I'm not without military understanding. It's been a kind of a hobby with me. The winter nights are long here up in Archangel. You might say we have all night and no day. It's compensation, I suppose, for the summer, when we have all day and no night. But an intelligent man must study something. So it has been my hobby to study the problems of the coming war. That is to say, this war which has now arrived. I have corresponded with the Military Attaché at Petrograd upon the subject. He knows me, and I believe he has almost as much respect for some of my opinions as I have for some of his. Only some, mark you ; I said only some. For the rest, maybe as much contempt—maybe as much contempt.”

He chuckled to himself, carried away presumably by some memory of that correspondence. He recalled himself.

“But that's neither here nor there. What is important is that he agrees with me about the weakness of those Russian guns. It follows that we are also in agreement about getting guns in from England or America, anywhere Russia can buy them. And they'll all have to come in through Archangel, make no mistake about that, which makes it necessary there should be at least one good Britisher well dug in here to see that the Russians and the pro-Germans don't get things too well messed up. I've written to the British Government offering my services. I've also written to my friend the Military Attaché. He'll give me his recommendations, I hope. Meanwhile, I'm carrying on unofficially in my own small way, and when you

walked in here this afternoon and told me you were a shipping man on your way to Petrograd it occurred to me that I'd like to have your help. Will you do it?

"Why shouldn't you do? You speak Russian. You've lived in Petrograd. You've been mixed up in the timber trade in Hull. You know something about the conditions of trade and the work done in ships. And you're pro-British and you're young and keen. What more could I want? What you don't know you can learn, and that's a damn' sight better than having an expert out from England who doesn't know the Russians and wouldn't know a word anybody said.

"Now, before you say yes, one more word. I know what you feel about this fighting business in France. I don't think you'll find it dull in Petrograd, but when you hear stories of the fighting out there you'll maybe think there's something big you have missed. I've bullied you about taking on this job, but I'm going to give you a chance. If you think you'd be more useful in France, good luck to you. I'll have to find somebody else. Now think it over for a minute and make up your mind."

"I have no need to think anything over, sir. My mind has been made up ever since I left Hull. I am going back at the first possible minute."

He studied me gravely for a minute after I had spoken. He sighed.

"Very well, lad, very well. You know your own mind best. It's a sorely trying job I've taken on for my country, surrounded as I am by those whom I cannot tell for certain to be friends or foes. It's sad that I should have been waiting here for five weeks of war for someone of my own country to arrive who might give me a sorely needed helping hand, and the first free Britisher who comes along and to whom I appeal should turn me down. Well, I'll just have to carry on as best I can on my own. I only hope that other — fools like myself who see a job needing to be done for their country and take it on without count of the cost to themselves will be better served."

Through the low window I caught the silver shimmer of a great pile of fresh-caught salmon in a peasant's backyard. It arrested my impatience and made me conscious of the scene. The scent of the pines came in through the window. In the next house someone was singing. Everything else was as quiet as if the place were asleep. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and Archangel had definitely given up the attempt to find work for today. I looked out over the immense span of open water which makes this great natural harbour. In it floated two ships. If the captain was right there should have

been twenty-two ships there, loading and unloading. I was suddenly struck with the possibilities in what he had said. There was a war on. Nations of the world were fighting for their lives. If Russia went down, England might go down also. Winter was coming on quickly. Soon this harbour, Russia's only doorway to her allies in Europe, would be blocked with ice. I caught the picture. Russia would be cut off and the Germans within her gates would be doing all they could to help their compatriots who were hammering at them from without. But no Russian in Archangel to whom I had spoken, from the Governor downwards, seemed to realize the peril of this situation. Perhaps it was true that the only person fighting for the Allies who did realize it was this man standing by the window in this room. It might be that he was in truth fighting a lone battle for Britain up there in that semi-arctic outpost, seeing further than anyone else did, knocking vainly at the doors of governments, crying warnings from his wilderness which might go unheeded until disaster proved the point of them.

I looked at him with a new interest.

"I'm still waiting to hear what you want me to do," I replied.

He shook my hand.

"Good lad. I thought you were a good lad. You won't regret it. I'll tell you what you're wanted to do. When you get to Petrograd I want you to go to see Zelenoff, the Managing Director of the West Russian Steamship Company. It's a new all-Russian concern and the one which will have to do the most of our job when it really begins. I'll give you a letter to Zelenoff asking him to give you some sort of a post. Take it. Then all I want you to do is to keep in touch with me. If I'm to do my job for Britain up here, I must have somebody working for me in Petrograd whom I can trust to get me every bit of the information I want. That's what I want—information. I can't be there and here also. I must be here. But I can't be here in the dark. Do you understand?"

I was getting a glimmering of what he was driving at.

"Do I take it that you want me to be some sort of a scout for you, perhaps a spy?"

He jumped at it.

"That's it—a kind of a spy. But an honest spy, spying out for me a bit of dangerous land. Mind, it's unofficial at the moment. But when I get my official position, I'll see you're made official too. Are you on?"

I saw I had to bring this hopeless conversation to an end.

"I'd gladly help you if I could, Captain," I said, "but there is absolutely nothing I can do. I don't know the first thing about organizing transport for a war. You must be able to get a really

good man from somewhere. To employ me on a job like this is . . .” Blast this fellow and his ships! I wanted my uniform and my fight in France. I plunged: “It’s just plain crazy, and you must know it.”

He banged the desk.

“God, and what isn’t in this country? Will you tell me what isn’t?” Then he smiled. “There’s going to be a lot of crazy things done in this war, if you ask me. Employing a man like you won’t be the smallest of them.”

There was a challenge in what he had said.

“All right. If it’s as important as you say it is, I’ll consider your job. But I don’t know yet precisely what you want me to do.”

When I was leaving him about an hour later, my pockets full of notes on the Russian shipping situation with which I intended to familiarize myself on the train to Petrograd, a thought occurred to me. I was still a bit bewildered about everything. I wondered why this opportunity—if it was one—should have fallen to me.

“Now, Captain, it’s all right and I’m going, but if I hadn’t happened to turn up in Archangel at this moment you would have found someone else, wouldn’t you?”

He chuckled.

“Maybe I would, maybe I wouldn’t. But when you walked in that door it was in answer to a prayer. You may not be much good and again you may. But it was the God of Battles sent you, and you’ll have to do.”

With this strange valediction I went to get my things off the ship and transfer them to the Petrograd train.

CHAPTER III

I TURN PROFESSIONAL

TALL trees from little acorns grow, and there is a place in war even for Boy Scouts. Or so thought Admiral Bostrem, of the Imperial Russian Navy.

I spent four days on the journey between Archangel and Petrograd, four days which amply confirmed the captain's fears regarding the efficiency of Russian railway transport. I presented myself at the offices of the West Russian Steamship Company and was duly given a job. I was also given two days' leave before starting my duties in order to deliver the various dispatches I had carried from England. It was while I was trying to do so that I met an old friend, and the plot of my new career, as they used to say in the novels, thickened again.

On the way to Petrograd I had had ample time to think long and anxiously over the words of the queer Scots captain, when he had induced me with his odd mixture of play-acting and earnestness to throw my own ambitions overboard and accept the post of cabin-boy to him in his single-handed endeavour to hold the unseaworthy barque of Russia to a steady course across the uncharted seas of war, in the teeth of apparently every possible obstacle from hurricane to weevil in the ship's biscuits. Who was he? All I knew of him was that he was the Russian agent for a number of English firms and had been employed for some years past in shipping timber and furs out of Archangel to London, Hull, Leith, and other ports. He claimed to be in communication with the British Government and the British Military Attaché. For all I knew his correspondents might regard him as a pestering lunatic. Perhaps I had really wrecked my career for the hallucinations of a madman. On the other hand, it was plain even to me that there was a strong element of sound sense in all that he had said.

Another possibility struck me which I liked better. What if he were an agent of the British Secret Service who had been sent to this northern port in long anticipation of war for the special purpose of combating the activities of these Germans in the Russian mercantile marine? I had heard such things were done. If that were so,

he might easily have found himself in need of help in Petrograd, and he had pressed me, the first likely Britisher who came along, to aid him. But if he were really in the Secret Service there must surely be other British secret agents in Petrograd whom he could have called on. But perhaps he had some reason for not employing them.

So my thoughts had gone round and round. One fact remained. I had pledged myself to be an amateur spy, and I was entering Petrograd armed with a letter of introduction and primed with information for that purpose. Whether it was on the useless errand of a moonstruck madman or really to save Britain from real danger I ought soon to be able to learn when I received his further instructions. Until I was sure I was bound to carry on. But I was heartened to find that Zelenoff accepted me and gave me a job without question. That seemed to argue some measure of sanity in the captain.

Among the letters which the Hull Consul had given me for delivery in Petrograd was a message from the Boy Scout movement in Yorkshire to a certain Rear-Admiral Bostrem who had charged himself with the organization of a Boy Scout movement in Russia. But when I called at the Admiral's headquarters in Galernia Street to hand over the greeting I was informed that he was absent in the country and that all correspondence was being delivered to the offices of the All-Russian Commission for the Physical Development of the Population.

The offices of this Commission were in a street near the Youssoupoff Gardens. It was a sumptuous building, and I was received by a smart Army sergeant with his arm in a sling—a war casualty, no doubt—who heard my story with the respect due to the bearer of a message from the Boy Scouts of England's largest county to the Boy Scouts of Europe's largest country, and asked me to wait while he found someone of sufficient importance to do justice to this international occasion.

I was examining some sporting pictures on the walls, when I heard my name called by a voice I knew, and turned round to grip the hand of an old friend of mine, Lyudwig Chaplinsky. I was overjoyed to meet Lyudwig. Every schoolboy in Petrograd had worshipped him. He had been a pupil of Eugene Sandow and was a young Hercules himself. There was really nothing in the sport line in which he did not excel. He was brainy too, a graduate in economics and master of at least ten languages. His father and mine had been friends, and in our vacations—his from the university, mine from the school—we had boxed and wrestled together, and Lyudwig had taught me all about sport that I knew.

When our noisy greetings were over and he had felt my muscles and I his and found plenty of reason for congratulation on both

sides, Lyudwig wanted to know what had brought me to Petrograd in the middle of a war. I was immediately in a bit of a difficulty. I was dying to tell Lyudwig the whole story of my meeting with the Scots captain in Archangel and how I had been given a job that would mean more to the Allies than if I were shouldering a gun in France, but I remembered that the captain had enjoined circumspection on me and felt it would hardly be living up to the discretion expected even of a very amateur spy to go blabbing the whole thing out to the first old friend I had met in Petrograd. So I had to content myself with telling him what had officially brought me to the capital and mentioning casually that I had been offered some rather important war work with a shipping company which I was thinking of accepting. I confess I was hoping that my manner would persuade him that there was more in my tale than I was at liberty to tell. I didn't want him to think I was a shirker ; though, for that matter, I was wondering why he, a great hefty fellow, was not already in the Army and on his way to the battle front. I had yet to learn that they had different ideas in Petrograd !

Lyudwig pretended to disbelieve my story of the shipping job and to credit me with a secret mission to organize a tremendous force of Russian Boy Scouts to go to the aid of the Allied armies in France, but I was able to chaff him back by pointing out that he had just come down to welcome me on behalf of the Russian Boy Scouts, so we gave each other best and he took me off to his room to drink a cup of tea.

I had hoped that Lyudwig, once my hero, was going to give me a thrilling explanation of why he was not in uniform which would have enabled me to confide in him about my own job ; but I was almost as disappointed with Lyudwig's story of what he was doing in the war as I fancied he must have been with mine. Of course, who had a better right to be employed on a national physical-development commission than a practical expert such as he ?—and physique and health were without doubt of some importance in war. But I got the feeling that Lyudwig was really not very interested in the war. As far as I could gather, the work of this grandiose Commission consisted of receiving and issuing reports on the fitness of the troops at the front, and Lyudwig, being an economist, was employed on the statistical side of this work. I had to ask him if he was not a bit dissatisfied with this as a contribution to winning the war, but he turned it off with a joke which I thought to be in very poor taste and rather shocked me, coming from him. He said he had not spent all these years cultivating his muscles to have them torn to pieces by a splinter from a German shell. We parted with promises to meet again soon and a nasty remark from me that I hoped he would

be successful with his Boy Scouts. But it was all I could summon up. I was disappointed and hurt with Lyudwig.

Up to this moment, what I had seen of the war in Russia had really not impressed me very much. There were plenty of military uniforms to be seen in the streets of the capital, the newspapers were selling well with the latest reports from the fronts, and in a cinema which I visited in the evening to see my first news film of the war the proceedings were held up for nearly half an hour while the band solemnly played all the national anthems of the Allies and the audience loudly cheered and sang each one in turn. But the offices I had visited in Petrograd in fulfilment of my missions seemed just as dismayed and unorganized as those I had seen in Archangel, and the attitude of Lyudwig had been rather a blow. If this was in any way typical of what was happening all over the country it certainly was not going to be so easy for Russia to win its share of the war. I was viewing everything now, of course, through the eyes of my Archangel captain.

My first week in the shipping office was also rather disheartening. I had another interview with Zelenoff and was given a desk in the Marine Department checking accounts. This was all very well. I knew I had to learn the job, but I had expected to begin with something a little more interesting than checking through an English engineering company's bills for ship repairs. It seemed almost like stabbing my own country in the back. Besides, the bills were all months old. My work had nothing to do with the war. I wondered if Zelenoff was purposely putting me in a backwater, and wrote to Archangel to ask the captain's advice about it. This Zelenoff had had an unusual career for a Russian business man. I was told the story by one of my fellow clerks. He was now a dapper little man with fair hair slightly touched with silver streaks and every inch a typical business man. But his parents had been very poor and had sent him to sea while he was only a small boy. While he was serving as a first mate he had met the daughter of a Petrograd merchant who was making a fortune out of a turkish-bath establishment, and they had fallen in love and married. It had been one of the most-talked-of romances of pre-war Petrograd. Not long before the war broke out Zelenoff had conceived the idea of a shipping company with exclusively Russian capital, and with the help of his rich father-in-law had financed it and secured the Grand Duke Alexander for company chairman. The war had now thrust him into the limelight with a big opportunity, and it remained to see what he would do with it. I liked Zelenoff. He had been charming to me and had seemed energetic. But I was in a frame of mind to be suspicious of everybody.

Then one day, towards the end of my first week in Petrograd, when I was feeling rather bored with checking accounts and disgusted because the captain had not answered my letter, Lyudwig rang me up. Would I meet him at the Sanitas, a physical-culture club in the Troitzkaya, as he had something he wanted to ask me?

The Sanitas was at that time one of the most popular clubs among the smart set in Petrograd. It ran physical-culture classes for both sexes, and I had learned at our recent meeting that Lyudwig held a post as one of the instructors. I went along without much enthusiasm, but I was feeling lonely and glad of the opportunity to talk to someone. Lyudwig came quickly to the point. He wanted an assistant.

"What for?" I asked. "Your Boy Scout reports or your muscle-building class?"

"Both. Come along, Dorian, be a sport. You've got to take it on. There's simply no one else I can ask to help me."

I wondered for a moment if my leg were being pulled. Was I the only man who was available for doing any work in Russia? I go to Archangel and meet a captain and am immediately offered a job as a spy in a shipping company; I meet an old friend and am almost immediately offered a job by him. In both cases the argument is that I am the only man who can possibly help them. Was it a joke? I was about to jump on Lyudwig rather heavily, when I remembered that I hadn't told him about the captain. I had to take another line.

"But I've got a job already. And it's just as dull as I can bear, thank you." I forgot I had hinted that there was something mysterious about my occupation.

"But this is only in the evening. There's not much done at the Commission in the daytime. Perhaps it's not so dull as it sounds. Anyhow, you're not doing anything else. It would be something for you to do in the evenings, and there's a little money in it. Besides, the club will keep you in training. Give it a trial, won't you?"

I agreed to give it a trial by turning up next evening.

As Chaplinsky had said, there was not much done at the Physical-Development Commission in the daytime, and my curiosity was not long in being roused about what went on in the evening. I shared Lyudwig's room, a large one with two roll-top desks and several book-cases full of books dealing with physical culture and geography. When I arrived the first evening Lyudwig explained to me what he wanted. The Commission had decided to issue a short account of the different systems of physical culture, with recommendations on their use for the benefit of military and naval instructors. Would I begin to compile it? I told him I thought there must

be many people associated with a Physical-Development Commission with far better qualifications for compiling such a report than I. What about himself, for example? He murmured something to the effect that they were all very busy with other things. I put down Russia as a funnier place than I had thought it, but reminded myself that I was to be paid seventy-five roubles a month for this work of national importance, and began.

What Lyudwig had said was true. Everybody employed in the offices of the Commission was certainly very busy in the evenings. But I was puzzled by the type of men I met in the corridors and the rooms to which I had access. They did not look in the least like people with an interest in physical culture. They were, most of them, more like university professors. Then I discovered that some of them actually were university professors. I tried to talk one evening to a man whom I met in the lavatory about some sporting matter and was met with a blank stare. As it was the simplest thing I had asked him, he obviously knew nothing whatever about sport. I was not long in discovering that Lyudwig's own work had nothing whatever to do with physical development or even with the Boy Scouts we had joked about. He was always interviewing people—civilians, wounded officers from the front, refugees from Poland, members of the Red Cross, and numerous nondescript individuals. Even private soldiers and non-commissioned officers called. The interviews were all conducted in private, but, when his callers left, Lyudwig invariably had a new batch of notes to study which he carefully locked up whenever he left the room and took away with him at night in an attaché-case which he guarded with the greatest care. On the other hand, he encouraged me to leave my papers and charts lying openly about. Before long I was firmly convinced that in the whole of this magnificent All-Russian Commission for the Physical Development of the Population the only person who was in the least interested in physical development was myself!

I decided to tackle Lyudwig about it. I asked him point-blank what the real work of the Commission was. He replied quite seriously and without hesitation.

"Oh, it is useful for collecting information of various kinds. All sorts of things are useful in a war. There are people on our Commission who are influential in different ways—like General Voyerikoff, for example. People come here to see the Commission about getting things done, getting favours, and so on; and we ask them questions, that's all. Occasionally we get something which we think other departments might like to know, and we just pass it on."

There seemed an element of reason in the explanation. General Voyerikoff was the Chairman of the Commission. He was also com-

mandant of the Imperial Palace and one of the Tsar's closest friends. Many people might wish to use the Commission to try to get his influence for other purposes. I could also understand that it was useful to have an unofficial centre for the collection and examination of casual information from the war centres.

"But, tell me, how many people in this outfit are engaged on physical-training work besides myself?"

Lyudwig grinned. "Perhaps you are the Commission for the Physical Development of the Population," he said. Then he added quickly, "But keep that under your hat."

It was almost as mysterious as ever, but I could get no more out of him, no matter how I tried.

In my own job in the shipping office things began slightly to look up. I was still checking accounts, but the captain at Archangel had asked me for some information which I had been able to supply, and he had thought it sufficiently important to send me a wire of congratulation to my private address. I began to think I might be doing something of importance after all.

There was also work I had undertaken for Chaplinsky at the Sanitas. Three evenings a week I left the offices of the Commission at 8.30 and took Chaplinsky's classes. I had pupils for boxing and wrestling, and on Fridays I taught Swedish drill to a number of ladies. I enjoyed the boxing and wrestling classes; they were in my line. I didn't like teaching the women so much. In the Sanitas one heard a lot about the war. Among the members were business men of all kinds, officers and Government officials, and there was plenty of gossip and discussion after ten o'clock, when the serious business of the evening was over. It was around that time when Lyudwig usually turned up. I wondered if the Sanitas had also something to do with the information he carried around in his little attaché-case.

Then at the Sanitas I met Sergeant Vladimir Vlassieff. He had been sent to me by Chaplinsky for a course of boxing lessons. He was a little man, fit as a fiddle, and always bubbling over with good humour, and he astonished me by his education and knowledge of the world. It was not what I expected in a Russian non-commissioned officer. One evening while we were resting I asked him what he was really doing in Petrograd. He replied that he was on duty, examining machinery which was being sent from factories near the capital to his division at the front.

"I go on to Archangel after that," he went on. "Munition supplies arriving. I am responsible for accepting the delivery and supervising the dispatch to my division."

We talked about Archangel, which he had never visited. While we were talking, Madame Tamara, the leading musical-comedy

actress of Petrograd, came up to speak to me. She had been taking my Swedish-drill class while resting between engagements and wanted to ask my advice about a strained muscle. When she had gone Vlassieff asked me about her, and the talk drifted on to other actresses. I asked him if he had ever heard of Madame M——, but he could not recollect her. I told him of my conversations with Madame on the *Odessa*. To my surprise he was interested. He asked for a description of her, which I was able to give him in some detail. Her impression was still strong in my memory, and I had had plenty of opportunity for observing her.

He pressed me for more information about the people at Archangel, and I told him of the other revolutionaries who had landed from the *Moscow* and my fears—or, more particularly, the Scots captain's—about the loyalty of the Teutonic managers and employees of the Archangel shipping companies. But I still kept quiet about my relation to the captain. At last I ventured to ask Vlassieff why he was so interested in Archangel.

He laughed. "I like to know what lies before me. By the way, do you know Colonel Rakunadze?"

I shook my head.

"I should like you to meet him. He is also interested in Archangel and will be going there shortly. Yes, he would like to have a talk with you. Will you come and have a drink with us?"

I was rather surprised at the easy way in which the sergeant was suggesting appointments for a colonel, but I had an idea that Vlassieff was no ordinary sergeant. Also, of course, Russia was always a very democratic country. I asked when.

"Tomorrow, 6.30, at the Hôtel Medved."

I told him I was sorry, but I had my job at the Commission to attend to at 6.30.

"That's all right. I'll talk to Chaplinsky. He's a friend of mine. In any case, I think he rather wants you to meet the Colonel also."

The Medved was a very swagger place, noted for its fine wines, and a favourite resort of the grand dukes and the young bloods of the town. It added more mystery than ever to Sergeant Vlassieff that he should suggest it. I arrived early, and there was no sign of Vlassieff, but Jan Goulesko's famous band was playing, and the place was full of smartly dressed women accompanied by officers of the Russian and Allied armies. All were chattering and laughing. The war was literally miles away. I was tremendously impressed with the scene, as it was the most elegant society I had ever been in either in Petrograd or anywhere else, so I sat at a table near the entrance and studied it with a great deal of pleasure while watching out for Vlassieff.

When he appeared he was in mufti. He had with him a man as small as himself but with broad, very broad, shoulders, swarthy skin, black eyes, thin hair, and a black moustache which looked ready at any moment to leap off his face and fly upwards and attach itself to the ceiling. He stooped as he walked and had extraordinary bow legs, but I didn't see anything comical in him as he came towards me by the side of Vlassieff. The impression I got was distinctly the reverse. There was real distinction about the quick, firm stride with which he came forward. He fixed his piercing black eyes on mine, we shook hands, and I trembled a little inwardly. This was a man among men. While drinks were being ordered and he looked round the place, I had a chance to examine him more closely. His tunic was made of the coarsest material, normally used only for a common soldier's uniform. Only the crossed guns and the stripes in his epaulets indicated his rank of colonel. The St. Ann's ribbon showed that he had done something of note. I liked him at once. He was my idea of a soldier-adventurer. From the few words he had spoken I guessed he was not a Russian, probably a Georgian. When he smiled he showed strong white teeth and his moustache was sent up with such a jerk that it surprised one it ever came down again.

Prompted by Vlassieff, I went over again the story of my observations at Archangel. I was beginning to think I must surely have stumbled on something of importance. Again I had to paint my word-portrait of Madame M—— and go over step by step my visits to the Governor and the firms of shippers. The Colonel kept his eyes fixed hard on me during the whole narration. There were moments when I felt he was more intent on some study of me than on listening closely to every word I said, and I should have been embarrassed by this feeling that I was being subjected to an X-ray examination but for a sudden hero-worshipping liking which I had conceived for him the moment I saw him and which made me want to shine inside, if only I could impress him enough to win his friendship and his favour. But it was hard going, and there were times when I was about to become hot under the collar and falter under the scrutiny. When these occurred, he would break in with a gentle question which pulled me sharply round and set me off hot-foot on the track again, but left me with a queer impression that in the second's slipping of my equanimity I had revealed myself weak and naked to him, and that his question was just a courteous way of putting back the veil on me. But I liked him so much I didn't care what he knew or saw of me so long as he would like me.

When I had finished all I had to say, the Colonel turned abruptly from me without a word and beckoned to a waiter to get him some cigarettes. The interruption jerked me out of the spell under which

I had been falling. It reminded me that I had not the least idea why I was sitting here delivering by request an informal lecture on war-time conditions at Archangel to a colonel and a sergeant of the Russian Army. In spite of my new-found admiration for the little Colonel, it seemed to me there was an advantage being taken of me which I slightly resented. I thought they might let me share in the secret of why I was being pumped. I was also afraid the Colonel might think less of me if I didn't show some desire to know what it was all about. But I addressed my question to Vlassieff.

"Excuse my asking, Sergeant Vlassieff, but what is it that interests you so much in my doings at Archangel? Surely you are not afraid of this Madame M——?"

The last question was intended to be my joking apology for my curiosity. But the smile slunk guiltily off my lips when I saw it raised no answering smile on theirs. I felt I must have innocently made a *faux pas*.

It was the Colonel who replied. Although our table was scarcely within earshot of any of the others, considering the noise that was going on in the room, he spoke so quietly I had to lean forward in order to catch what he was saying. I stared into his black eyes and tried not to be aware of the acrobatic proclivities of his moustache.

"You have guessed a little bit correctly, Mr. Blair. There may be some reason for Russia to be afraid of Madame M——. There is enough reason, at least, for the All-Russian Commission for the Physical Development of the Population to be grateful to you for having brought her to its attention."

I looked from him to Vlassieff. Either I was on the brink of learning something about the real work of the Commission at last, or my leg was being most elaborately pulled. But Vlassieff's face was perfectly serious.

"But why—but what," I stuttered, "has the Physical-Development Commission to do with a revolutionary like Madame M——?"

I had a horrid idea that I had been guilty of denouncing her to the secret police. I could scarcely believe that she could be dangerous enough for it to have been necessary for me to have her career stopped that way.

The Colonel looked at me narrowly.

"Mr. Blair, I propose to let you into a secret. You are a man of honour, so I take it you will guard it with your life. As you have undoubtedly guessed, the Physical-Development Commission is not what it appears to be. It is a blind. I will tell you. It is the centre of our Russian organization for counter-espionage."

It needed a moment for the significance of this statement to sink in on me.

"You mean," I faltered, "that Chaplinsky and all these professors are spies?"

He smiled at my wide-eyed amazement.

"If you like, we are spies. At least, we are the spies who fight the enemy spies."

I grinned rather sheepishly. I was thinking of the evenings I had been spending in the Commission offices turning out my draft of the Commission's recommendations on the best systems of physical culture. I was also thinking of my own small job as an amateur spy and wondering if they could possibly know about it. It suddenly struck me that they were perhaps about to denounce me, to arrest me and charge me with enemy espionage. Perhaps they had altogether the wrong idea of me.

"Then my work is just waste paper?" I asked doggedly.

The Colonel laughed.

"Oh no. It will be published and circulated. It has been most useful. The Commission must justify its existence."

This was better. Perhaps they weren't trapping me. Another thought came to me.

"And the Sanitas Club. Is that also a blind?"

"No, no! The Sanitas is real enough. But it is useful."

We were all silent for about half a minute in which I looked from one to the other and went on wondering what on earth they intended to do with me. Then the Colonel quietly continued.

"I am letting you into our secret, Mr. Blair, for a reason. I think you may be able to help us. You have asked me if we are afraid of Madame M—— and her friends of the Social Democratic Party. I am truly not much worried about them. The Russian people are loyal to the war. Our ordinary politics have been suspended until it is over. There is less danger from that source than ever. Of course, if our armies were to fare badly, if we were to be defeated and invaded, if the people were to suffer, then your Madame M—— and her friends might fish these troubled waters. Even then I should be sceptical of her success. Marxism is not the bait with which to catch the Russian peasant. But there are many enemies inside Russia, working for her defeat, who are not in that sense revolutionaries. Germany has many spies and many friends. You yourself have suspected some of them at Archangel. The importance of what you have told us about Madame M—— and the other revolutionaries who have landed at Archangel is not so much that they are here but that only you have told us about them. It confirms our suspicions. There are people at Archangel, as there are many in Petrograd, who would like to see Marxism spread among the workers at our docks and in our factories to make them discontented

and make it more difficult for Russia to win this war. They will use Marxism and anything else they can lay hold of to bring about Russia's defeat. Some of these enemies of Russia are Germans by race or birth. Some are Russians who are being bought with German gold. Others are afraid that Russia will win for another reason, a political reason."

I had to strain my ears to hear; Colonel Rakunadze was speaking so quietly.

"There are some of them in this room, and the Germans are using them all they can. Unfortunately, many of them are in our highest, most important places. Germany may or may not be able to beat us at the front. Unfortunately, there is a grave danger that if we are not very careful she will have us beaten from behind. I tell you all this to show you how important is the work of our Commission if Russia is to carry the war through to success. The Commission must have workers in many places. Vlassieff and I are outside workers for the Commission. We work in the Army and elsewhere. We think you might do good work for the Commission also in this outside sphere—in your post, for example, in your shipping company. What would you say to that?"

I had listened to the Colonel's whispered exposition with a queer feeling that at any moment not only his moustache but the man himself might suddenly fly up to the ceiling and leave me alone in the room. It was all too preposterous. The orchestra, the uniforms, and the gay women—all would disappear and I should discover that the whole conversation was just the result of too much Russia, too much war, my own dramatizing of my job at the West Russian Steamship Company, and my romantic attempts to seek an explanation for what went on in Chaplinsky's room. My reason was telling me this was much too like the fantasy one reads in boys' books about war. It could not possibly be the real stuff of war itself. It is so easy to believe in spies at sixteen, one becomes cautious by the age of twenty-one. But Chaplinsky and the offices of the Commission were real, and there was a mystery about them. The Sanitas was real. All this scene and Vlassieff and the bustling little Colonel had been real enough when I was saying my piece. They were real enough still, and there had been a mystery about them.

"I—I should like to, awfully," I found myself saying, "if there is anything you think I can really do."

"You'll find plenty," laughed Vlassieff.

"You'll be all right," said the Colonel. "We'll start you in a small way. I liked your way of telling us about the people at Archangel and Madame M——. You've got a gift of noticing things, and that's what we want our people to have. And you want Russia to win."

Just then I remembered that I was already a spy in a small way. It seemed so small now I was embarrassed about mentioning it. But this seemed an official business and the captain at Archangel had said his job was unofficial. I decided I had better tell them about the captain and his fears that Russia might let down the Allied cause. I did it diffidently in case they might laugh at me and tell me I had been taken in by a lunatic.

"But that's splendid," said the Colonel. "We must work with your captain. He might be exactly the man we want up there. And you're already doing exactly the sort of work we want you to do. For the moment remain as you are. You will receive your instructions through the Commission. When I go to Archangel I shall want you to come with me. But I'll fix that with your office in some way. Meanwhile, I should like you to come and see me at my office. I want you to know where I am. Can you come the day after tomorrow?"

He named a time. I took out my note-book to write it down. He put a hand on mine.

"You must learn to trust your head."

I looked at him in surprise.

"The perfect spy, the man who can never be caught, is the man who never requires to take a note. Remember that."

CHAPTER IV

CONSPIRATOR AGAINST THE TSAR

I WALKED away from the Hôtel Medved shyly enjoying the only absolutely undiluted thrill I think I have ever experienced. There was no doubt about my status this time—I was a spy-fighter, a real professional spy-fighter in the service of one of the Allied governments. I had no longer any doubts about the authenticity of Colonel Rakunadze and Sergeant Vlassieff. The place of my appointment with the Colonel had settled that. We were to meet at his nominal headquarters in the General Staff offices in the Morskaya Street. But I could not believe now that I had ever really doubted him. I felt positive that from the moment I had set eyes on him he had enjoyed my unhesitating loyalty and that I was ready to die for this odd-looking little man if only he would commend me for it.

My thrill was not clouded even by worries about my ability to perform the work that might be set me. That was something else the Colonel had done for me, given me confidence in my power to serve him. It must be fine to work with a man like that, I told myself. I must make good with him. I had no distress either about abandoning the captain. If his work really meant anything, I ought to be able to help him more than ever now that I had behind me so obviously clever an organization as the official Russian counter-espionage service. What an idea to disguise it in the shorts and singlet of the Physical-Development Commission ! I was sure that must have been the Colonel's idea. I raced up the steps of the Commission building and threw my treatise on the world's physical-culture systems at Chaplinsky's startled head. Now for some real war-work, I said.

My education as a spy-fighter was considerably developed during the next six months. The daily programme was much the same as before—I worked at the shipping office during the day, the Commission and the Sanitas Club in the evening. But it was all rather different now. I was somebody in the know. There were definite jobs I was given to perform. I looked out for certain things ; I followed up other things ; and it was all done with the close co-operation of the Commission. It all had to do with shipping, but it ranged to Sweden and Norway and as far as England, and had

repercussions even farther field. We had our defeats and tragedies. Some of our secrets leaked out and we lost several ships. But we had our victories. We let other secrets leak out and bagged three submarines. I was in the confidence of Zelenoff; my Scots captain was now with us and was pleased with me; and from time to time I earned what I most desired—the approval of Colonel V. A. Rakunadze. I learned to call him by his nickname of Rak, and my cup of young joy was full.

One day in June 1915 he sent for me.

Rak's official headquarters, as I have already mentioned, were in the General Staff offices entering from Morskaya Street. He held some post in the Artillery Department. Although I knew his room was directly over the main entrance, I had always to permit myself to be led all round the building, upstairs, along corridors, down narrow spiral staircases, and through other people's offices before I could reach it. It was a ritual to which all his visitors were subjected, and no matter how often I visited him I was in honour bound not to allow the commissionaire to suspect that I was no longer taken in by his Cook's-tour procedure. Rak himself invariably respected it. His room was guarded by an ante-chamber in which sat a magnificent adjutant who wore a large pocket-watch strapped to his left wrist, and as far as I could tell he seemed to have nothing to do except to consult the watch with an owl-like solemnity every five minutes or so.

I never knew whether Rak discovered him or created him, but nearly every night the adjutant was to be found seated at a table in one of the restaurants or pleasure-houses frequently glancing at his watch with every expression varying from humorous annoyance after the first hour to an infinite boredom after the fourth or fifth. The supposition was that he was waiting for Rak, who was engaged in one of the private rooms with some lady or other. In this role he was something of a public institution in Petrograd and a butt for all the wits, who vied with one another in inventing lewd nicknames for him and his monstrosity of a time-keeper. But he was good camouflage for Rak, who was generally somewhere else of course.

It was also in accordance with the ritual of these visits that Rak sat me down in the chair by the window overlooking the corner of the Hermitage and the covered passage connecting it with the Winter Palace, while he perched cross-legged on his desk and proceeded to put me wise to the latest developments of the military and political situation. He was always most anxious that we should fully understand the broad lines of any movements affecting the fields in which we were working.

News from the front was distinctly gloomy in June 1915.

Throughout the winter, things had been more or less stationary. After the disaster in the Tannenberg marshes, Hindenburg had forced his way right up to the suburbs of Warsaw, but the Grand Duke Nicholas had driven him back across the Vistula and out of Poland into Silesia. The armies operating against the Austrians had gone into winter quarters along the River San, which was a good way into enemy territory, and remained there. Public spirits, which had been dashed by the German invasion of Poland, had gone up again. Patriotic Russians were inclined to pat themselves on the back and to be contemptuous of the French and British armies, which seemed unable to begin driving the Germans out of Flanders. Were their armies not well into Austria? Spring would see the Russian armies push right on to Vienna and Berlin.

But the better-informed opinion in the Commission for the Physical Development of the Population was much less confident. We had alarming information about the intense artillery concentration which Hindenburg's generals were effecting all along the Russian fronts, and we knew that, despite incessant clamour from the armies for the reinforcement of the Russian artillery equipment, the Petrograd War Office was doing nothing whatever about it. I remembered all that the Scots captain had foretold at Archangel nine months before, and took off my hat to him. Owing to the shortage, all batteries had been cut down from six guns to four, and the ration of shells per gun and the firing regulations were almost ludicrous.

The Germans hardly waited for spring to justify these fears in the Commission. In February they began sweeping us back in north Poland in the district of Mazovia. There had been treachery at work there. Rak had spent weeks at the front, but the Germans continued to know every move of the Russians. Fortunately, the effect of this reverse on home opinion had been offset by a further backward landslide of the Austrians. Whole regiments of Czechs deserted to the Russians. Przemyśl fell, and Russian troops climbed over the Carpathians and marched into Hungary. There were actually rumours that Austria was on the point of suing for a separate peace. The pro-Germans of Petrograd whispered gloomily at their restaurant tables.

But May had brought the smiles back to their faces. The German general, von Mackensen, with German troops and artillery had come to the aid of the Austrians in Galicia, and Russia's incapacity stood fully revealed. The Germans prepared the way for their offensive with a terrific bombardment. An artillery officer who visited the Commission had told Chaplinsky that the German guns had fired ten shells for every yard and a half of the Russian line.

Hardly a man was left alive in the shallow trenches, and the Russian guns had scarcely a shell with which to reply. The enemy carried everything before him, and the Austrians claimed to have captured 170,000 prisoners and over a hundred guns. Fresh troops were rushed up, but there were no rifles for them to fire. Unarmed men were sent into the trenches to wait for the rifles which their wounded or dead comrades dropped when they fell. Whole regiments were without ammunition of any kind. The Russian defence was reduced to fists and bayonets, and the broken rabble was pushed back again to the San. As if this were not reverse enough, the week before I visited Rak the Germans had begun a new offensive along the Baltic coast. Riga was expected to fall any day, and in the Petrograd meeting-places there was panic talk of the Government having to move to Moscow or even farther away.

This much, of course, I knew in rough, but Rak filled in some of the minuter details. He sketched also the repercussions which were developing at home. The peasants were grumbling about the duration of the war. They wanted their sons back for the harvest that year. There had been riots in Moscow. The secret police had managed to convert them into anti-German demonstrations, but they had begun in the factories because of the rumour that still another line of reservists was to be called up. The people were angry at the Government's conduct of the war. Posters were to be put up in the streets announcing that the Army had plenty of guns and shells, but the censorship had been unable to prevent the truth from becoming known. There were too many people who were interested in having it spread abroad. Guchkoff, the Liberal politician who was now working with the Red Cross, had announced to a meeting of the Union of District Councils that since the beginning of the war Russia had lost 3,800,000 men—killed, wounded, and missing. This was a terrible shock. The public mind was inflamed by its conviction of treachery at the top, sparing not even the Emperor and Empress themselves. Rak broke off suddenly.

"I found the traitor of Mazovia."

This was exciting news to be so calmly announced. This was the battle of Mazovia in north Poland in which Russia had suffered very heavy losses owing to treachery, already referred to above. I knew Rak had been working on this problem for months.

"Who?"

"Myasoyedoff."

I had to think a moment what this name was supposed to convey to me. Then I remembered. The Myasoyedoff scandal had taken place some time before the war. Myasoyedoff had been an officer in charge of one of the stations on the German frontier. Guchkoff,

the stormy petrel of pre-war politics, had denounced him as having sold Russian military secrets to the Germans. He had challenged Guchkoff to a duel in which he had missed and the politician had refused to fire. Myasoyedoff's guilt was definitely established, but Soukhomlinoff, the Minister of War, had given a personal guarantee of his loyalty for the future, and his position in the Army had been restored. Now, according to Rak, he had been proved a traitor again. And Soukhomlinoff, his protector, was still Minister of War!

Petrograd gossip had it that Soukhomlinoff owed his post as Minister of War to keeping the Tsar amused with his fund of funny stories. One group held that he was merely incompetent; the majority of the gossips held that he was determined to let Germany win. He certainly bore the chief responsibility for the tragic shortage of artillery supplies, and this Myasoyedoff business was surely a proof now of his double game. But I was eager first to know how the traitor had been caught.

Rak's moustache shot up to release his broadest smile.

"Because somebody carried notes. One of your bright British intelligence officers in France found a note-book on the body of a dead German Staff officer which contained a list of names. Among them was that of poor Myasoyedoff."

"Is he dead?"

"Hanged."

"But how did Myasoyedoff get his stuff through?" I had a professional interest in these matters now.

"With the help of a railway bill-posting agent in this town. He pretended to be interested in a business which is being extensively advertised. Sent this agent his confirmations of the bill-posting arrangements by letter or wire. They were in code for the dispositions of our troops. The agent sent them on through Sweden."

"You've got him, too?"

He pointed his finger at me from his cross-legged perch on the desk as if it were a revolver.

"Bang!"

We both laughed.

"But Soukhomlinoff. What about him?"

"We'll get him next. Very soon. Voyerikoff has that in hand now. There is enough evidence now with Myasoyedoff to prove things to the Emperor. We'll have Maklakoff, too, and Shchleglovitoff."

General Voyerikoff was the Chairman of the Commission for the Physical Development of the Population. He was the commandant of the Imperial Palace and greatly respected by the Tsar. Maklakoff was the Minister of the Interior and a noted pro-German. He was supposed in Petrograd gossip to have been given his post because he

made the Imperial children laugh by his imitations of animals. Our chief case against him was that for months he had been opposing the formation of a committee of business men and experts who wanted to reorganize Russian industry for the task of war. Shchleglovitoff was another pro-German minister, Procurator of the Synod.

“And Rasputin?”

Rak’s smile disappeared. He twisted the end of his moustache until I thought he might pull it off.

“Unfortunately, no. Not yet. Not Rasputin. It will be difficult enough to remove the others. To try for Rasputin as well would finish everything. The Empress would go mad with rage, and if we tried to touch Rasputin now we shouldn’t get one of the pro-German guard.”

I knew what he meant. It was well known that the Empress, Rasputin, and the pro-German ministers formed a solid, mutually defensive block with the Tsar very much under their influence. It might be possible for Voyeikoff to persuade the Tsar that the safety of the country demanded the dropping of the ministers, to get him to dismiss them behind the Empress’s back or even in defiance of her wish, perhaps ; but even the Tsar would never dare to touch Rasputin without her approval—and that she would never give. Indeed, at the slightest sign of danger to him she would marshal all her forces for his protection, and then it would be impossible to induce the Tsar to move in anything.

“But with a set of the right ministers in power,” went on the Colonel with emphasis, “when they had shown what they would do and won the confidence of the Emperor and the country—particularly the Emperor—or had been able to make it impossible for the Emperor to dare to dismiss them without rousing the country, then it would be possible to deal with that holy one. Then we could tackle Rasputin. If our plans concerning Shchleglovitoff and the others go right, we shall soon have these new ministers. Meanwhile, the evidence for Rasputin could be prepared.”

He looked at me pointedly.

“Would it appeal to you to do a little bit of the collecting?”

My eyes goggled.

“You mean—me tackle Rasputin?”

Rak roared with laughter.

“Well, hardly. Not quite that. He is no fool, that one. You would find him a handful. But to keep a watchful eye on him, to become friendly with his associates, perhaps even to become friendly with the devil himself—that is something you could do. To be frank, we want evidence for an impeachment in the Duma. If it were

handled the right way and the Empress tried any kind of action against the Duma . . .”

He hesitated, to let his point sink in, and continued almost in a whisper.

“ . . . it might be possible for Russia to win the freedom she desires.”

I considered the suggestion, but the point of it was not quite clear.

“What kind of evidence do you expect me to get about Rasputin?”

“Perhaps the same as we are using against Soukhomlinoff.”

“Trafficking with German agents?”

“Why not? We are almost sure about Manouiloff. And Manouiloff is his friend.”

I nodded.

“All right. How do I go about this job?”

He got off the desk and began to walk about.

“I have arranged it with General Voyeikoff. He is to appoint you an officer of the Emperor’s flying corps, the officer in charge of supplies. That will have several important advantages. In the first place, it will not seem that you have been planted there with any interest in Rasputin. But it would be an important enough post in the personal service of the Emperor and in the Army to give Rasputin’s friends some interest in you if you should show any desire to become friendly with them. Secondly, it will give you freedom of movement to any of the places you are likely to require to go. You will be stationed at Tsarskoe Selo. That means you will have access to the Imperial Palace. As supplies officer you can come to Petrograd as often as you wish and always have something important to bring you there. But you can be, quite naturally, at Tsarskoe every time Rasputin visits there. Thirdly, it will also be possible for you to fly, if it should be necessary, to General Headquarters. Part of the Emperor’s corps is always stationed there.”

I saw an objection to that at once.

“But I can’t fly and I don’t know anything about aeroplanes.”

“I know. You are beginning your training at the flying-school next week.”

“And my job with the shipping company?”

“Chaplinsky is taking care of that. We have told your friend, the Archangel captain, that you will be leaving him. He says good-bye with much regret.”

“And my being English—that won’t hinder me?”

“On the contrary. It should make you even more interesting to the Rasputin circle. Now, if you will attend carefully I’d like to tell

you some things about the Imperial Court which I think you ought to know. But let's go somewhere ; I'm tired of being shut up here."

The conversation was continued in the garden of a popular Petrograd pleasure haunt, the Villa Rode. We were driven there accompanied by the Timekeeper of Love (this was one of Petrograd's most respectable names for Rak's comic adjutant).

I had asked him if there was any truth in the implication behind the cynical tale current in Petrograd that the little Tsarevitch had accosted a visitor to the Palace with the question : "When the Russians are beaten Papa cries. When the Germans are beaten Mama cries. When am I to cry?" Was the Empress really so outspokenly pro-German as people said she was ?

He pulled down his moustache and looked up at me quizzically.

"A little story like that has its uses."

He paused and eyed me again.

"So you think Soukhomlinoff and Maklakoff are working for the German Emperor?"

It was my turn to stare at him.

"But don't you ? Haven't you told me about Soukhomlinoff and Myasoyedoff ? Don't we know that Soukhomlinoff is responsible for the Russian losses by holding up the supply of munitions ? Isn't he being helped right and left by Maklakoff?"

"True. All true. But you underestimate our difficulties if you think Soukhomlinoff and Maklakoff and all their friends are just pro-Germans. Don't you understand that they too are fighting for Russia, not Germany?"

"Russia?"

"Their Russia. So also is the Empress. If Soukhomlinoff and Maklakoff believed Russia to be at war only with Germany, I firmly believe they would be working with us to have Russia win. But this war is something different for them. For them it is not a war between Russia and Germany. They see it as the people of France and England see it—as a life-and-death struggle between democracy and autocracy, between the armies of the peoples and the armies of the kings. Look at it this way. On the one hand you have France and England—one a republic in fact, the other a republic in all but name. On the other side there are the Emperors of Germany and Austria with the Sultan of Turkey, autocrats all. It is the greatest tragedy in history in the eyes of the Empress, who sees things more clearly than the Emperor does, that in this war between peoples and emperors, between democracies and autocracies, Russia, the supreme autocracy, should be lined up in the wrong camp. She sees her Russia—of which her husband is the autocrat—by a grim irony assisting the hated democracies to accomplish the overthrow of all.

the other existing autocrats, her brothers and friends ; and she hates it because she sees in the victory of the democracies her own end. She realizes that if the Allies win and the Kaiser and the Emperor of Austria are dethroned, the Russian autocracy will be left to stand alone. But it cannot stand. When the peoples are supreme all over Europe, the crowns of the tyrants of Russia will also be rolling in the dust !”

The relish with which he made this melodramatic statement was startling. Although I had known all along that Rak was a Liberal, I had not suspected him of this degree of bitterness in his political outlook.

“But the Russian people are solid for a victory of the Allies,” I cried with some heat.

The little Colonel’s reply came with the fervour of a poet.

“This nightmare of the Empress is the dream of the Russian peoples. The Russians, the Poles, the Ukrainians, the Georgians, the Armenians, the Finns, the Tartars, and the Jews—what is it they all long for ? To be free ! To be a community of free peoples. With a free Europe, with the free world we have been promised after this war, is it not inevitable that there should also be a free Russia ?”

I had to make a protest.

“But it may not be necessary to go as far as to dethrone the Tsar to get this free Russia.”

The Colonel raised his eyebrows as we turned in our walk at the end of the grass square.

“Not if the Tsar will be content to be a king like the King of England, perhaps,” he murmured.

I pressed my point.

“But he might. After all, he has promised the Poles their own government when the war is over.”

Rak threw his head back and laughed.

“Your English blood is making a simpleton of you. Nobody knows what the Tsar might do. That is true. But the Russian peoples will never become free with the consent of the Empress. She is already demanding that the Emperor withdraws his promise to the Poles.”

I was aghast at this suggestion.

“But that would be dishonourable. It would be rank treachery——”

He interrupted me with a rude gesture.

“Dishonourable, rank treachery—are these not the hallmarks of the Russian autocracy when it fights for the preservation of its own rights ? Can you not think of a thousand examples ?”

I was still bewildered.

“But the Allies would never stand for it.”

He slammed the weak ball back at me.

"Is that not just what I have been explaining to you? Is that not the reason of the dilemma of the Empress and the actions of the Soukhomlinoffs and the Maklakoffs and all their crew? Is that not why they are afraid the Allies will win the war?"

He resumed the walk and his normal quiet tone.

"The Empress is in a quandary. I am not one of those who believe that she is pro-German in the sense of wishing to see Russia humiliated and defeated. I have Voyerikoff's oath that that is not so. But she cannot allow the Allies to be triumphant. Soukhomlinoff and Maklakoff are of the same mind. They also wish the autocracies of the world to be preserved, whatever the cost to the Russian people. But they are not in a dilemma. They are willing to pay the price."

"Victory for Germany?"

"If need be, victory for Germany."

There was only one other question to ask.

"And the Tsar?"

Rak shrugged his shoulders.

"I will tell you an old story about the Tsar. It is very old, goes back to 1905 days. One day the Emperor received a Liberal nobleman in audience. They discussed the unrest throughout the empire, and the nobleman implored the Emperor to redress the wrongs of the people, to remove the tyrannies of the bureaucracy, to give facilities for education among the peasants, to permit greater freedom of the Press and speech so that grievances against the bad features of the system could be ventilated without creating festering sores which were bound in time to affect the whole body and perhaps destroy it. The Emperor listened carefully and, when the audience ended, dismissed the nobleman with the words: 'You are right, perfectly right.'

"The next to be received was a reactionary landowner who demanded a revival of the worst forms of repression as the only recipe for removing unrest from the land. Again the Tsar listened carefully and replied: 'You are right, perfectly right.' When the landowner had gone the Empress appeared from behind a curtain and said: 'Niki, twice within the last half-hour I have heard you approve contrary opinions. This will never do if you are to be a real Emperor. You must have opinions of your own and stick to them.' To which the Emperor replied: 'You are right, my dear, perfectly right.'

"That is the Tsar. The trouble is, he is never allowed to realize his own pathetic ignorance and limited intelligence. God wound him up to be Tsar of the Russias, and he will go on being industriously stupid until the mechanism runs down or something stops it.



The Tsar Nicholas II, to capture whom and force him to grant democratic government, Mr. Blair joined in a plot with other members of the Russian Military Intelligence. The plot was frustrated by the murder of Rasputin by Prince Yousoupoff.

He slammed the weak ball back at me.

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"There is another story I can tell you. Some years ago the Council of Ministers was considering a new taxation scheme, and the Prime Minister's views were opposed by the majority. The Prime Minister explained the whole circumstances to the Tsar and persuaded him, when the matter came before him for his supreme decision, to support the minority view. The pact between the Tsar and the Prime Minister leaked out, with the result that when the Council of Ministers met to approve the final draft for submission to the Tsar, a number of them changed sides and the Prime Minister got his majority. But when the scheme came back from the Tsar the Prime Minister discovered to his horror that the Tsar had remembered his instructions too well. He had been persuaded to favour the minority, so he favoured the minority, and the country got the wrong scheme.

"The poor Tsar's knowledge of the world is bounded by the walls of his Palace. His knowledge of men and women consists only of those who come in direct contact with him. A man only becomes human to the Tsar when he has set eyes on him and seen that he has two legs and arms and is a being somewhat similar to himself. The unseen millions are only his subjects—peasants, merchants, workmen, students, soldiers—subjects of the Tsar. They have no reality to him except as the people whom God has set under him for him to rule. There is no responsibility from him to them, only from them to him."

"But the war," I replied. "What is the Tsar's attitude to the war?"

"When the Tsar is with his soldiers he wants to win the war. When he is with the Empress he does what she and the ministers want of him."

"Then he means nothing to us at all, and this damned Russia is just a broken reed!"

It was a cry of despair. All the misgivings I had had when the Hull Consul had asked me to go back to Russia returned with a rush.

Rak paid no heed to my emotional display and continued his walk and his talk in the same even tone.

"So you see now that winning this war is not for Russia just a simple matter of troops and guns or even of spies and counter-espionage. It is a war within a war in which a new Russia is struggling to be born and others are fighting to prevent it from being born. It is impossible to say how our end will be achieved. But you can be calm. It should be enough for you that the aims of this new Russia we hope to create are the aims of the Allies. It would be fatal for our hopes if Russia were to let the Allies down."

He stopped suddenly.

"There is another thing. A change to something a little better may come soon. Voyeikoff is the friend of the Tsar. He has been working on him. So has the Grand Duke Nicholas. In a few days the Tsar is to pay a visit to the front. It should not be difficult to get him into the right mood. He will be persuaded to call a Council of Ministers at the General Headquarters and to give Soukhomlinoff and Maklakoff their walking orders. If possible, Soukhomlinoff will be charged with treason."

"And if the Tsar should refuse?"

He gripped my coat button and smiled into my eyes.

"Then we shall have another Tsar."

I gasped.

"Who?"

"Nicholas."

"Is he willing?"

Rak nodded.

"If he cannot win the war by any other way."

"And the Army?"

"The officers will be told the reason and can explain it to the men. They will understand. They have lost too many comrades to fail to appreciate there can be no other way. As for the professional and business classes, members of the Duma, the county and the town councils, they are eager to mobilize themselves to help the Army to win the war. They know well enough Maklakoff and the Empress are refusing to let them play their part because they are afraid they may become too strong. But Nicholas is different. He is not afraid. So they will support Nicholas."

"And the peasants?"

"They will support us if we promise them a quick ending to the war."

It was rather breath-taking to be introduced to a revolutionary plot so suddenly as this. I stared at the little man in front of me and listened to a troublesome thought knocking at the back of my head. If a new regime were coming so soon, what was the point of this Rasputin mission which he had given me only half an hour before? Heaven knows I was ready to welcome anything which would ensure that Germany would not win, but it seemed crazy of Rak to begin instructing me in a job which might take a considerable time and then wind up the talk by letting me into a secret plot which, if it came off, would abolish the job before I could even begin. With the Emperor and Empress off the throne, Rasputin would surely cease to mean anything at all. I blurted out my mind to Rak like a schoolboy who has just discovered he has lost his place in the team.

He patted my back caressingly.

"There is so much you have to learn about our Russia. The good God gave everything to the Russians when He gave them the gift of speech. They love to talk. They do not often love to act. Besides, the Tsar is still the Tsar. Many have gone into his presence to strike and come out on their knees. They cannot be unfaithful to the Tsar. It may be so this time. There is always the possibility, of course, that the Tsar may agree to dismiss Soukhomlinoff. You look on yourself as our second line of attack. If the Emperor agrees and we get Soukhomlinoff and Maklakoff this time, we shall want the Empress next. And to get the Empress we must get Rasputin first. If we get none of them this time, and our little revolution also does not come off, we shall want the Empress all the more. And that means Rasputin again."

My tongue stuttered over the words I wanted to say.

"But the Emperor will never give up the Empress?"

"Of course not."

"Then when I spy on Rasputin I am to be a conspirator—against the Tsar? Because I am not a Russian? That is what you have been telling me all this time?"

He patted my back gently again.

"It is life that is conspiring against the Tsar, my good friend. But I shall need my Timekeeper tonight and I must not wear him out. Come, I shall introduce you to a waiter I want you to know. Then we must go."

CHAPTER V

RASPUTIN NEXT

THE military flying-school was at Gatchino, and there I spent the next three months, learning to fly under the tuition of Colonel A. Boreiko, a Knight of St. George, also under the French ace Pégout and a Lieutenant Carrol, and making myself thoroughly acquainted with the care and maintenance of Russian flying-machines. Since they were rather inferior machines on the whole, and spares were difficult to obtain, flying at Gatchino was an exercise in which only Russians could be expected to take an unclouded joy.

"My belief," said one of the mechanics to me on the first day I was going up, "is that success in flying is something that depends upon the condition of the soul. It stands to reason it is so. Flying so high brings you nearer to God, and when a man with a bad conscience, or a doubter or an atheist, goes so near to God, he becomes nervous in his soul and is worried and flies badly, and so the man and the machine come down. But a good man need have no fear however close to God he goes. So every time a machine comes down, whether the pilot is killed or not, I say to myself, 'He is a bad one, that one, he could not bear to find himself close to God.' So look you in your own soul, sir, if you would know whether it is safe or not for you to fly." This was the philosophy of the man on whom I depended for the airworthiness of my first machine.

But the average Russian pilot was quite prepared to accept this extraordinary attitude to the problems of flight and matched it with a fatalistic philosophy of his own. All airmen in the war were superstitious and fatalistic in their outlook. They had to be. But with the other nationalities it was mainly bravado, while with most of the Russian flying-men I knew it was a super form of the Russian war-disease: a pathetic belief that the reckless heroism and personal self-sacrifice of men must by some law of natural justice in the workings of war prove stronger than any machines. To win the war it was only necessary for enough of them to be ready to die. The pathos of this belief was that their commanders were convinced that all they had to do to win the war was to be ready

to send enough men to die. At Gatchino—and at the front—we were flying machines which took half an hour to climb to a working height. There was not a single 'plane equipped with a machine-gun. The only method of attack or defence suggested to us was to ram the enemy's machine and go down with him in flames. With the manœuvring speed of our machines our hopes of even performing that operation successfully were faint. But it was done, again and again and again.

At Rak's request I sent him reports on all I observed of the way the flying-school was run. But my soul must have been in pretty good trim—perhaps the old Russian God was rather partial to spies—because I got through my training period unscathed. The most exciting moment I had in the air was at Pskoff, where I was sent to take part in the trial flight of one of the giant six-seater Ilya Mourametz machines which the Sikorsky factory had begun to construct. The petrol-pipe burst in mid air. We got down safely, but our commander, Lieutenant Nicholsky, who had made a valiant effort to hold the burst pipe together, lost the fingers of one hand. I spent another month at Pskoff, and at last the notice came transferring me to the First Squadron of the Tsar's Own Flying Corps at Tsarskoe Selo.

The four months I had spent away from Petrograd had been an exciting period for the student of Russian affairs which I had now become.

In my first fortnight at the flying-school, after my talk with Rak, I read the news with an excitement I could hardly conceal. It came at last—as Rak had predicted. The Tsar called his ministers to Headquarters, and the reactionaries, Soukhomlinoff, Maklakoff, Shchleglovitoff, and Sabler were all dismissed. The Duma was summoned to initiate a national effort to win the war. Russia took off its hat and cheered the Tsar. I had cheered with them, and murmured into my blankets : "Rasputin next."

After the dismissal of the Soukhomlinoff gang the country's confidence in the Tsar and the Government had begun to revive. A competent general, Polivanoff, was appointed to the War Ministry and immediately began to make things hum. Liberal ministers were added to the Cabinet in place of the pro-Germans who had been dismissed. The Duma voted for the trial of Soukhomlinoff, and to everybody's astonishment the Tsar agreed. A central committee of all political parties to join with business men and experts in assisting the War Ministry to speed up the supply of munitions was also granted. There was a great hope in the land that the Tsar would dismiss the remaining reactionary ministers and form a complete Cabinet of national confidence, a Cabinet which would

first win the war and then go on to the great reforms which were so much desired.

The excitements were not all so rose-coloured. In July the Germans began a drive into Poland. In the first week of August, Warsaw had to be abandoned. Kovno, Novogeorgievsk, Osovets fell in quick succession. Before I left the flying-school the whole of Poland was in enemy hands. This was a terrific reverse. People were distressed but not dismayed, however. Russia was so big. There was room enough and also men enough to stem this enemy advance and beat him back now that munitions were on the way. The Tsar had shown he was all right. It was only his advisers who had led him astray. But this new confidence in the Emperor received a crushing blow when the Tsar announced that he had removed the Grand Duke Nicholas from the supreme command of the armies at the front and was now to be commander himself. There was consternation everywhere. It was again loudly asserted that the Tsar must want to lose the war, and that the public idol, the Grand Duke, had been in his way. The Empress, the German woman, had done this, she and her holy one, Rasputin. It was a belief among the common people that he had access to her bed.

I went to see Rak just after this announcement. The little Colonel was depressed. The dismissal of the Grand Duke was undoubtedly the work of the Empress, he confirmed. Someone had told her of the plot to replace the Tsar by Nicholas, and she had decided to get him out of the way. He was much too popular with the masses and the soldiers for her liking. If commanding the nation's armies in war-time made a hero out of a man, there must be only one hero and that the Tsar. Rasputin, of course, had played his part. He hated the Grand Duke, who had spurned with scorn every effort Rasputin had made to win his favour.

Earlier in the year Rasputin had sent a telegram to the Duke informing him that he was about to visit the front in order to give his blessing to the troops, to which the Duke replied : "Come and I shall have you whipped." Rasputin's answer had been to announce to the Empress a vision he had in which it was revealed to him that the Russian armies would never be victorious until the Emperor commanded them in person. This last Rak had had from General Voyeikoff. As soon as she learned of the deposition plot the Empress had moved. She was now pressing that Rasputin should be permitted to attend all meetings of the Supreme Command to give the generals the benefit of his prayers and his heaven-sent advice ! The Tsar had not yet consented to this suggestion, as he was afraid the generals would rebel, so she had given him Rasputin's comb and solemnly implored him to comb his hair with it every time he

had to meet the generals or the ministers, in order to secure the strength to resist their demands. Rak raised his hands in despair. What could one make of a country with such rulers?

I had scarcely returned to Pskoff to wait for my transfer to come through when Rasputin was in the limelight again. This time he had paid a visit to Moscow and become involved in a drunken brawl in a restaurant. The proprietor had called in the police, and the police inspector had telephoned the Ministry of the Interior at Petrograd for instructions, and Dzhunkovsky, assistant minister to Prince Shcherbatoff, the Liberal who had taken Maklakoff's place, had been bold enough to order Rasputin's arrest and immediately laid the whole circumstances before the Tsar. But within twenty-four hours Rasputin had been released, was back in Petrograd, and Dzhunkovsky was dismissed. Prince Orloff, one of the oldest friends and servants of the Tsar, protested, and he was also dismissed from all his posts.

This Rasputin was a hot one to offend, evidently.

CHAPTER VI

A LEG, A LADY, AND A TRAGEDY

My first object in the plan outlined for me by Rak was to ingratiate myself with some of Rasputin's friends, and for this I had a plan of my own. I determined to connect myself right from the start with Rasputin's most intimate friend, the reputed German spy Manouiloff.

This Manouiloff was a well-known figure in Petrograd. He was a Jew, nimble-brained, a witty talker, popular with women, and cultivated by men because he was reputed to have more knowledge of all the ways, legal and illegal, by which money could be made than anyone else in Petrograd. For all his knowledge, Manouiloff was not a rich man. He was not the money-making type of Jew. Money was too diverse for Manouiloff; it flowed in too many fascinating channels, all of which he loved to explore for the sheer pleasure he got out of pitting his wits against the rocks and currents that were supposed to make navigation difficult in them. Honest men looked askance at his cleverness and wished his suggestions were not so diabolically tempting and ingenious, while the less honest looked at Manouiloff and wondered why it was that only crooked men had such beautifully crooked ideas. But he made enough money by journalism and supplying financial information to be seen night after night in Petrograd's smartest restaurants.

The Commission had supplied me with some details of his earlier history. At one time he had been in the employment of the secret police and had been sent by them to Paris, where he had spied upon the Russian revolutionaries residing there. He had sent back news of a bomb-throwing plot which was being organized from London, and had played a part in the stealing of a code from the Japanese Embassy during the Russo-Japanese War. He had also been employed as an *agent provocateur* in the 1905 disturbances. There was a further suspicious circumstance, regarding him as a German spy, in that he had originally been friendly with a group of Rasputin's enemies and had only recently cultivated the holy peasant's acquaintance.

The plan I had formed was to approach the Jew with a scheme for founding a magnificent physical-culture institution in Petrograd

as soon as the war would be over. It was to be a greatly enlarged edition of the Sanitas Club with facilities for sampling every kind of health and beauty treatment, from the nostrums of the ancient Egyptians to the electrical marvels of Dr. Bodie. It was the sort of thing that should appeal to Manouiloff because of the opportunities it afforded for colourful promotion, international concession-selling, and the most enticing excursions into a positive surfeit of profitable sidelines. My own connection with it was rational, following my association with the Sanitas, and it was through one of my pupils as Chaplinsky's understudy in the ladies' Swedish-drill class that I intended to procure my introduction to Manouiloff.

I had chosen Mademoiselle Berdicheva as my stalking-horse for two reasons. The first was that she was friendly with Manouiloff, and the second that while I had been teaching her she had shown a rather embarrassing desire to be friendly with me which I had pretended to ignore. She was too buxom for me, too blonde, too aggressively feminine in every way, too much of a Russian Mae West. Besides, she was now middle-aged. I had been told by Rak, however, that the perfect spy, or spy-fighter, has neither likes nor dislikes in any department of life, but should be prepared to eat cold porridge with the same relish as caviar, so I was ready to reopen acquaintance with Berdicheva, though she should have less taste than cold porridge for me. I made my first call on her unannounced, in the faint hope that if I caught her by surprise I might accomplish my errand and get away again without too much fuss. I gave my name to her maid and was shown into her room.

I was greeted with a generous wave from a naked female leg, no distant playful waggle, something to which I could shyly nod and then politely turn away my eyes, but the whole limb waving across my vision from the gleefully squirming toes right down to the rounded end of a well-fleshed thigh. I had no doubt to whom the leg belonged. I had seen it often enough before. Besides, somewhere behind its welcoming kicks I could hear Berdicheva's big blonde voice raised in a richly vituperative chant: "Come in, come in, you rascally son of an hour of sin. Don't stand there as if you'd never seen a leg before. Come in!"

Berdicheva was undergoing massage. She grinned happily at me from under her blonde curls, and extended a hand and arm to be kissed.

"But where have you been all this long time?" she chattered. "Of course I know that you've been away, learning to fly. But why haven't you been to see me since you came back and let me see you in your nice new uniform? I love an aviator. How high can you fly? Stand back and let me see how well you look."

I complied and looked round for the masseuse. She was over in a corner, preparing some stuff in a pot over a spirit-stove. She was a tall, dark girl, but her face was averted over her work. I thought she was probably hiding a smile over my embarrassment.

"But you look marvellous !" gushed Berdicheva, and it seemed for a moment as though she were about to throw away the towel which covered the more private parts of her body and leap on me with a rapturous kiss. Involuntarily I took a step back and she roared with laughter and sat upright, hugging the towel round her and running an appreciative hand down her muscles to the knee.

"But you must feel these ! Haven't I become a credit to you since you went away ? I don't go to the Sanitas any more. This is all Natasha's doing, not yours. Isn't it, Natasha ? Come over here and be introduced to my nice Englishman. Isn't he sweet ? He used to blush every time he asked me to bend. So you don't want to make acquaintance with my lovely legs ? Well, well, the Emperor chose the right person when he gave you wings. You English angel ! But sit down and tell me all the scandal you have heard about the Palace, while Natasha does her work. Have you met the Empress yet ? Natasha, Natasha ! Don't mind him !"

But the dark Natasha was evidently more modest than the brazen blonde beauty whom she served, for she fetched a low screen before proceeding to apply to Berdicheva's plump body the unguent she had prepared, and I got through the rest of the conversation without more serious alarms. It was touch and go once or twice when Berdicheva became specially animated over something she wanted to say and threatened to bob more than her head above the top of the screen, but the watchful Natasha quickly pulled her down. I began to like this Natasha, for there was a vigour in the way she played the watch-dog which gave me the idea that she was no fonder of this tow-topped pink-and-white cow than I myself. But I do Berdicheva an injustice. She was a thoroughly good sort although she did not please me, and she turned up trumps on this occasion.

When I had satisfied her curiosity about my life at Tsarskoe Selo, which had been very unexciting up to that moment, I broached the real object of my visit. In five minutes the details had been arranged. She insisted on giving a little dinner-party to which she would ask Manouiloff. She would telephone him that evening and find out when he was free, and if I would look in the next afternoon and drink tea with her she would give me the date and discuss a list of other people who might be useful and should be invited. This second visit hardly suited my book, but there was no way out

of it without being ungracious. On this agreement I felt I could take my leave.

As I shook hands shyly with the masseuse, I imagined I saw a mute apology in her eyes for the behaviour of Berdicheva, and I wanted to say something nice to her, to let her know I had understood and that I welcomed this little bond between us, but my cursed rawness where women were concerned came in to spoil things, and I made a fool of myself by jumping back and saluting her with an absurd pomp and over-smartness, as if she had been at least a major-general. She burst out laughing, in which Berdicheva joined, and I kicked my way angrily down the stairs in deep self-mortification. I was convinced Rak had picked me for my present post for no other reason than that I was such a child no one would suspect me of it.

Next day when I called on Berdicheva I was told that a meeting with Manouiloff could not be fixed for at least a fortnight as he was leaving the next morning on a business trip to Sweden. As soon as I had left her I raced to the Commission to report my news of Manouiloff's trip to Chaplinsky, so that he could arrange to set a watch on him. I dreamt that night I was an asp on Berdicheva's ample bosom.

A few days later I was dining in the mess of the officers of the Tsar's corps at Tsarskoe Selo when a discussion arose about what we should all do when the war should be over. Rak had advised me that when I was trying to make people believe something about me I should never lose an opportunity of living up to the role I was creating for myself, even if my hearers had no apparent connection with the group for which the pretence was originally intended. One never knew, he said, what measures one's quarry might be taking to check up on one, and in any case every bit of practice made the pretended role more perfect. So, acting on this advice, I joined in the discussion and produced my scheme for the foundation of the physical-culture institute. When this had been explored from every angle, an officer of one of the Guard regiments confided in me that he was also thinking of going into business when the war was over, the carpet business, to be precise. This seemed such an odd line for a Guards officer to be considering that I chaffingly asked what on earth had led him to that decision.

He replied quite seriously that he had had an offer of a partnership with a Swede who was making pots of money out of it. They had met a few nights before in the lounge of the Hôtel Astoria, where the Swede was staying. Now I knew this Lieutenant V—— to be a brilliant billiards player and a pretty-able bridge partner, but I could not imagine any business man being likely to think of him as

a possible business associate, and I concluded, and said so, that the Swede must either have been drunk or was having a joke with him.

V—— was hurt.

"You'll see," he protested. "Immediately the war is over I'm resigning my commission. We're going for a fishing holiday, the Swede and I, and then I'm starting in business."

"Yes," I answered scoffingly. "Fishing at the North Pole or in a pot-hole in the Sahara Desert, perhaps, with billiard-cues for fishing-rods and bait made of cigarette stubs. Well, look me up when your Swede has done pulling the leg off you, and I'll give you a job as commissionaire of the gymnasium."

"But you don't know how serious he is."

V—— was beside himself with his inability to impress me.

"Everything is arranged. We are going fishing at Mogileff."

"Where?" I shouted.

"Mogileff," he repeated.

"Now I know who was drunk at the Hôtel Astoria," I said, and with that cultivated specimen of our mess-room repartee I left him.

I told the joke to one or two others during the evening and raised a storm of mess-room laughter over the idea that V—— should be proposing to go fishing at Mogileff when the war was over. Mogileff had become the General Headquarters of the fighting armies since the Tsar had taken over the command, and as most of those I told the tale to, as well as V—— himself, had spent a large part of their recent lives there and were heartily sick of the place, it should be evident what a gorgeous war-time jest it was that the ass V—— should be solemnly proposing to go for a fishing holiday there after the war was over.

Round about midnight I overheard someone else tackling the indignant V—— about this project.

"But we shan't be fishing all the time," V—— was still protesting. "We're going to see all the places where the war was fought. Halmar is terribly interested in the war. He's a student of military history, he says. It's his hobby. He has written a book about the campaigns of Gustavus Adolphus."

I was beginning to be sorry I had loosed the mess on to V—— this way.

"Look here, old chap," I said, "I'm sorry if I was a bit rude about that job of yours. After all, why shouldn't you take up the carpet trade? It's a perfectly respectable business. We'll maybe all have to be business men when this war's over. Have a drink and tell me some more about it."

Poor V—— was touched. He was ready to forgive me in a

second if he could only unload the whole story on me and be given a chance to justify himself. Halmar was the Swede's name, and they had met in the bar of the Hôtel Astoria. The introduction had actually been effected by the bar attendant, who had suggested that V——, who was drinking alone, might be able to give the answer to a question on which the Swede was seeking information. The question was beyond V——'s ability—it was whether the British had invited the Russians to help them to attack the Dardanelles—but the Swede had not seemed a bit put out at not getting his answer and was frank in his pleasure at being permitted to talk to one of the Tsar's own personal-staff officers. This was flattering to V——, who had never been encouraged to regard himself as being in any way important, and when the Swede mentioned his idea of making a post-war tour of the battlefields and indicated how grateful he would be for a few tips on the most interesting places to visit, I could imagine that the Russian had visibly expanded. It was not long before the Swede suggested that they should retire to his room and make a map of the itinerary.

Up to this point my interest in V——'s rather painfully earnest account of how the business proposal had developed had been politely fragmentary, but at the mention of the map I woke up suddenly.

"You drew him a map of the front? Not with the army positions, I hope."

There was a positively hair-raising innocence about this V——.

"But I am a very accomplished map-maker. I know all the troop positions intimately. Until I came here a week ago I frequently made copies of the army dispositions for use at Staff conferences. The Swede was most interested to see how we are preparing for our new offensive. He was most intelligent about it. I could see he was a really serious student."

St. George for Merrie England!

"But, V——, seriously, you don't mean to tell me you have been drawing maps of the front with all the positions of the armies and the reinforcements and so on, and giving them to a Swede? Didn't it occur to you the man might be a spy? But you don't really know anything important, do you? You don't really draw maps at General Headquarters?"

V—— bridled.

"It is not easy to copy extremely well. The Swede could see I had a gift for it. It is because I could copy designs so well that he wishes me to join his business."

"But, you ass, you ass, V——, don't you realize it's treason to reveal military secrets?"

V—— stared.

“But he was my friend. I could not be so unchristian as to refuse him what he sincerely wished to know.”

Almost any one of Russia's eight million soldiers might have made the same excuse as V—— had made, not merely for talking freely to a Swede, but even for talking to a German. Torture by wild horses could drag nothing out of them, but against the charms of common humanity they had no guard. My heart missed a beat when I looked at the arch-innocent V—— and heard him offer his Russian Christ as his apology for handing over the entire dispositions of the Russian Army to a possible enemy spy.

“We'll have to do something about this damn' quickly. Is he still at the Astoria?”

V—— didn't know, but the Swede had told him to write to the Astoria whenever he had news that the war was coming to an end. Poor, poor V—— !

It was against the regulations for either of us to leave Tsarskoe Selo without special permission, but the regulations would have to go hang.

I asked V—— if there would be time to alter the arrangements for the attack and received the reply that it was not intended to take place for over a month yet because the troops could not be concentrated in less time owing to the fact that there were almost no railway-lines running parallel to the front, and troops had to be moved in a roundabout way inland. It seemed, then, that we could still prevent the worst harm that could arise from V——'s disclosures to the Swede, even if we were not in time to arrest him. But when I mentioned this (to my mind ameliorating) circumstance to V——, thinking to raise the gloom which had descended on him as he began to comprehend the enormity of what he had done, I got the shattering reply that the Germans always knew what was going to happen and were always ready for any move which the Russians had planned as a surprise. And when he had made this remark the spirits of this astounding fellow actually began to rise again as if he seemed to think that one more leakage of information could not be considered heinous at all. I was ready to grant that there seemed to be something in his claim. My foot slackened on the accelerator pedal, and I rolled along the streets of Petrograd with a disturbing feeling that all I might get out of this adventure would be to be scolded and sent home to bed.

Chaplinsky took a hearteningly different view, however. He spoke on the telephone at once, and in a few minutes two cars full of soldiers and an officer drew up at the street-door of Chaplinsky's flat. The officer came upstairs, and he and Chaplinsky talked together

in another room. The officer then asked V—— to accompany him to the Astoria, and Chaplinsky asked me to remain behind. When they had gone he told me I had better get back to Tsarskoe Selo.

"But V——?" I asked. "Shouldn't I wait for him?"

"I shouldn't bother," replied Chaplinsky. "There's a comfortable cell in the Hôtel de Croix waiting for him."

The Hôtel de Croix was a common name for one of the Petrograd prisons.

"But V——'s not responsible for what he has done," I protested. "He's not a criminal. He's just a fool."

Chaplinsky cut me short.

"We get so few of the criminals in this country. It's about time we had some of the fools."

Although I had been engaged on jobs as a result of which spies had been caught and shot, I had had no contact up to this time with any of the condemned individuals themselves. I had never even seen a proved spy. It had been a long-distance, impersonal game in which the quarry was a vague thing called the enemy, who were darkly mysterious individuals manipulating and manipulated by a machine. It was understood that spies and those who helped spies had to die when they were caught. But it was different with V——. I knew him and had myself been the instrument by which his innocent misdealing had come to light. I drew up my car by the roadside on the way back and gave way to a foolish boy's meditation on the horrors of war.

I went to see Chaplinsky as soon as I could next day. The Swede had been arrested at the Astoria but had stuck to his tale. He had readily handed over V——'s maps and had protested vigorously against the charge that he had intended to disclose to the enemy the information he had obtained. He had also produced proof that he was the author of several books on past wars, as he had said. The Swedish Ambassador had already taken the matter up, and in the absence of any proof of his criminal intentions Chaplinsky was afraid that the Swede might have to be allowed to go. In the meantime the Commission was checking up all his business connections in the hope of something coming to light.

For nearly a week V—— and the Swede were held in custody, and Chaplinsky had nothing vital to report. The Swede had no connection with anybody in Petrograd except among a small community of Tartars who lived on the outskirts of the capital and made meagre livings by dealing in horses and weaving a loose kind of cheap carpet in their homes. Halmar bought their carpets from the Tartars and shipped them to Sweden. Then two pieces of information emerged simultaneously. A Swedish agent reported

that occasional batches of Halmar's carpets found their way to buyers in Germany, and questioning of the Tartars had elicited that Halmar had supplied them with some special designs for a new batch of carpets only the day before his arrest. I saw the designs in Chaplinsky's room, where they were being carefully compared with V——'s beautifully drawn maps. They reminded me of the old Assyrian and Egyptian picture records on the tombs of the kings. There were the same angular-looking, simple representations of animals and human beings, chiefly bears, horses, foxes, and reindeer, while the human beings were all hunters with bows and arrows. There were also queer groups of three or four toy-like trees, cone shapes for hills, and rough blue lines and squares and circles which might have represented lakes and rivers.

When the designs were placed side by side with V——'s maps it was not difficult to spot the key. The wild animals represented different regiments of infantry, the horses cavalry, and the archers were the Russian artillery, which was by way of being rather a pretty ironic joke. Attached to each design was a number which was woven on the back of the rug, and this number apparently corresponded with divisions on a common map. Given the numbers and the rugs, the decoder was ready to build up a beautiful map of the positions and strengths on any section of the Russian front. Chaplinsky went into ecstasies over the ingenuity of the scheme and complimented me warmly on having been the means of its being brought to light.

I was hopeful that the authorities would take a lenient view of V——'s part in the affair. After all, real traitors were being permitted to go about unscathed and men whose crimes had been amply proven continued to find positions of trust. I asked Chaplinsky to arrange for me to see V—— and wrote a letter to Rak imploring his aid. But the reply I received from Chaplinsky was to say that V—— had hanged himself in his cell.

CHAPTER VII

A GIPSY'S PROPHECY

I WAS still only an apprentice spy, as my reactions to the V—— episode had proved.

Manouiloff remained away in Sweden, and in consequence my plot for approaching Rasputin through him and Berdicheva was badly hanging fire. In any case, the tragic end to the V—— business had turned my stomach and I had decided to give up using Berdicheva as a stalking-horse to Rasputin. There was a malevolent jinx on this whole spy-fighting business, I told myself, and I had no wish to have blonde Berdicheva's ghost plaguing me as I already had V——'s. Better leave the innocent well out of all this. I was casting around for another approach altogether, when an accidental meeting opened the door for me straight to the devil himself.

Among my friends at Tsarskoe Selo was an officer named K——. It was he who shared the railway-coupé with me in which we lived. He was about my own age and was an observer and photographer to the squadron. I liked him immensely, although I was always squabbling with him over his lazy ways. He had a passion for poetry and the works of George Bernard Shaw. He had, in fact, begun to translate Shaw into Russian, and used my services as a linguist now and then. He played the mandolin prettily and sang in a nice light voice, and our coupé was plastered round with Aubrey Beardsleys of his choice. Soon after I had joined the squadron his wife and baby had followed him to Petrograd, and I had offered them the use of my flat. I was a frequent visitor there on my evenings off, for his wife was as merry and companionable as K—— himself, and on one of these visits I was introduced to an engineer named Bratolyouboff.

Bratolyouboff was an inventor. He had recently been given an opportunity by the Russian Government to prove the value of a marvellous impenetrable armour plate which he claimed to have discovered. Bratolyouboff's discoveries were always of that extreme philosopher's stone variety. There were no half-measures about them. It was all or nothing with him. But the impenetrable armour had been pierced as easily as any other when it had been tried out on special armour-plated cars, and Bratolyouboff had been dropped.

Just before I met him he had staged a wonderful come-back. He claimed to have invented a flame which nothing could put out. He had visited General Headquarters, and the idea had caught the fancy of the Tsar, who was persuaded that it was just the thing to use on Berlin if the Russians ever got near enough to the German capital to set it alight. He had sent Bratolyouboff back to Petrograd with an order to the chief of the military technical department at the Ministry of War to give him everything necessary for his experiments. Bratolyouboff had a workshop of his own in Kronversky Prospect, but the War Ministry had supplied him with a car, workmen, a large area of waste ground for his experimental fires, and, of course, very large funds. When I met him, Bratolyouboff was the coming saviour of the Allies and lord-elect of the earth.

On this particular evening he was full of the interest which Rasputin was taking in his experiments. Rasputin had been to his workshop and had told him that if he encountered any obstruction from the authorities he was to apply to him. I pricked up my ears at this talk of Rasputin and wondered if this might provide me with the opportunity I had been seeking. Even if the jinx was still upon me, Bratolyouboff was no friend of mine. I told Bratolyouboff I was very anxious to meet Rasputin since I had heard so much about him. He was delighted to be able to show on how good terms he was with the great and invited me forthwith to join a party he was giving at the Villa Rode which Rasputin had promised to attend.

I had expected that Bratolyouboff's party would be a mixed one, but I was wrong. When I arrived it was composed entirely of men. The usual entertainment was in progress, and we listened, talked, and drank champagne while we waited for Rasputin to arrive.

I had been prepared for a wild, unkempt creature—the moujik in his greasy boots, as Rasputin had once described himself. I saw instead an impressive figure dressed in a long, highly respectable black coat crossing the room. From under the coat showed a blue silk blouse, black velvet trousers, and long boots. It was peasant costume, but a refined, almost elegant form of it. The rough moujik was a greater dandy than any of us. His hair was freshly oiled, parted in the centre, and hung straight down to his shoulders, where it slightly curled. The beard was combed and silky and divided in the centre. John the Baptist from the steppes had got himself a *friseur*. From a distance the refined effect was immensely heightened by the unusual pallor of his face. But when he sat down I had another shock. There was nothing spiritual or ethereal about this pale saint. His pallor was not derived, as it sometimes seems in the case of those who lead particularly ascetic and unselfish lives, from a super-

refinement of the skin which seems to want to let the soul shine through, but was a hue of the skin itself, a thickly waxen, muddy grey from which the blood of life had drained away, leaving a coarse envelope of lined and nearly haggard flesh. His features were ugly, a harsh original on which the years could possibly have erected a not unshapely superstructure of strength, but had built instead a forbidding monument to self-indulgence and debauch. I was as shocked as if I had seen right down into his soul, and stared at him open-mouthed.

He took his seat without a word of greeting for his host or anybody. We had all stood deferentially. However, when he gave no sign to acknowledge our presence or to indicate his pleasure or mood, but gazed blankly and unseeingly through all of us, we slid into our seats again and there were some uncomfortable moments in which we all seemed to be wondering what to do next. Waiters hovered in the background, the orchestra had stopped playing when he appeared, and the guests at the other tables were silent, craning their necks to watch the spectacle at our table, as absorbed in this Rasputin as we. Once he heaved a deep sigh and we all thought he was about to come to life, but his eyes remained focused on the wall at the other side of the room, his body hunched and his whole attitude as broken and despondent-looking as could be. At last Bratolyouboff broke the silence which lay like a pall on the whole room.

"You are not with us tonight, friend."

"Something is troubling you?"—this from a man they called Stuermer.

Another expectant pause, and then Rasputin stirred.

"Give me wine. Let them play," he muttered in a hoarse, thick voice. Then urgently, "Wine, wine, I say, quickly. My soul is dark as stagnant water, heavy as lead."

Immediately Bratolyouboff, Stuermer, everybody except myself, was calling excitedly for glasses and wine, although there was already plenty of both on the table. Waiters dashed here and there, and the orchestra leader plunged the band and his singers into a shouting, stamping, devil-may-care tune. The people at the other tables sank back to discuss the scene with their food and drink.

I was disgusted with the theatricality of it all, the obsequious pandering of Bratolyouboff and my fellow guests, the trained expectancy of the Villa staff, and what I imagined was the absurdly crude posing of this debauched hypocrite pretending to be bowed down with the burden of his holy cares. His expression remained unchanged, but his little flax-blue eyes now moved round the table, noting each guest in turn. When they fell on me, Bratolyouboff

was waiting and jumped in with the introduction. Rasputin made no sign of hearing, merely continued to favour me with a long stare. His eyes were small and narrow, and set exceptionally deep in their sockets, but they were dull, flaccid, almost fish-like, and I wondered if under the play-acting he was perhaps not actually a tired, weary man, as ill and sick of soul as he looked.

He gravely inclined his head.

"Welcome, my son," he said. The eyes left me and he spoke to Bratolyouboff.

I had been received.

When the fresh champagne was set before him he tossed down three brimming glasses one after the other without pause. He seemed to brighten up slightly after that, but showed no desire to take part in the conversation. The others seemed to be used to his ways and paid no particular heed to him now. He fascinated me. I watched his ferret eyes roam all round the room, noting who was there. He seemed lost for a moment in the music. Suddenly he seized the champagne-bottle and filled up his glass again and drained it, once, twice, thrice, again without stopping. This was the Rasputin in action who was in the habit of getting violently drunk in these public places and making a scene, the Rasputin who smashed windows, insulted women, and made ugly, drunken love to the gipsy girls. I wondered whether we were to be favoured with a glimpse of the rake-hell of Pokrovskoe before the night was over. Suddenly he snapped the stem of his glass in two pieces between his fingers and laughed out loud. Everybody turned to him.

"Drink, drink !" he shouted. "Drink, and to hell with my enemies!"

We all hastened to obey the injunction, and he filled the cup of his own broken glass again.

"To the friends of Rasputin who are the friends of Russia !" announced Bratolyouboff.

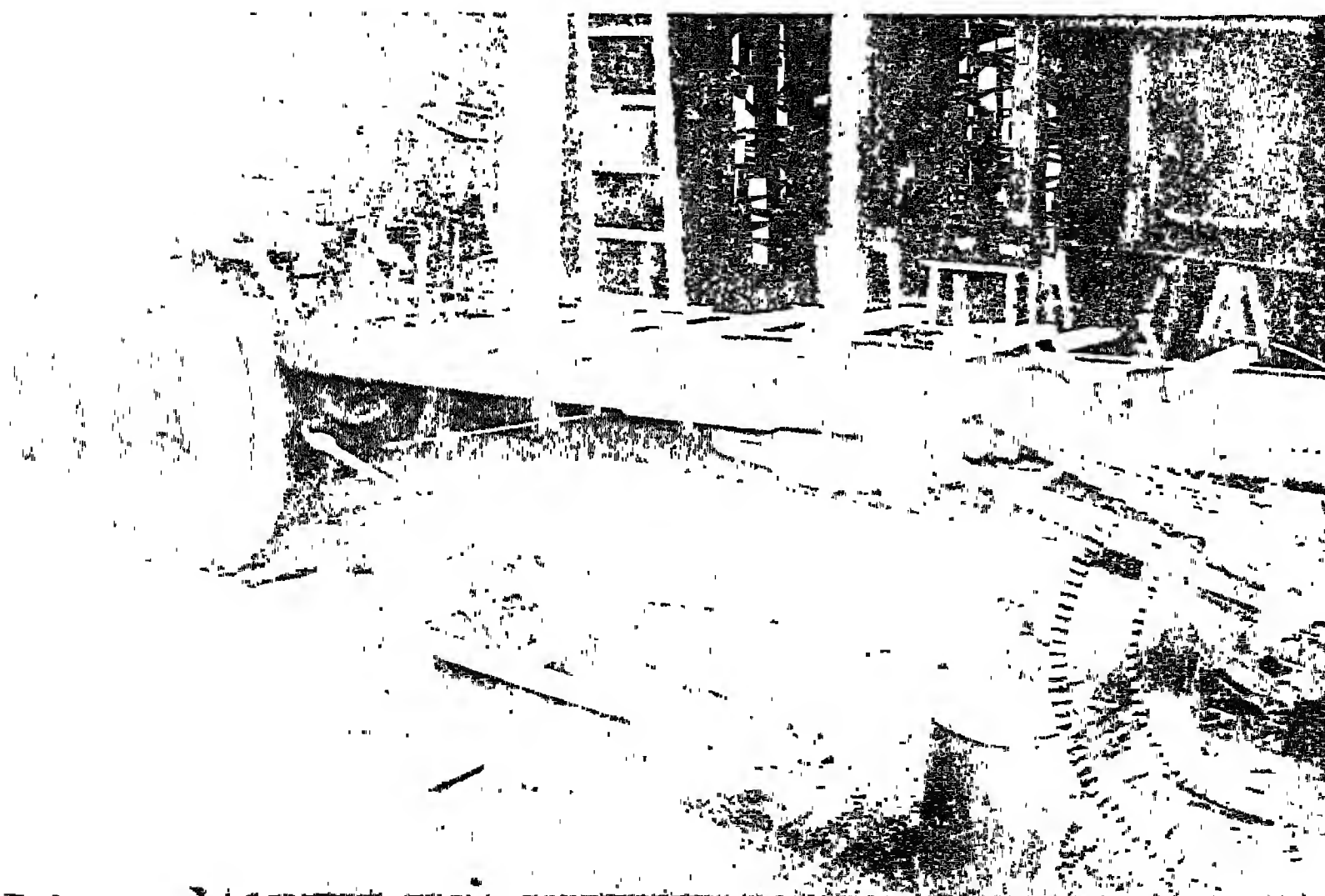
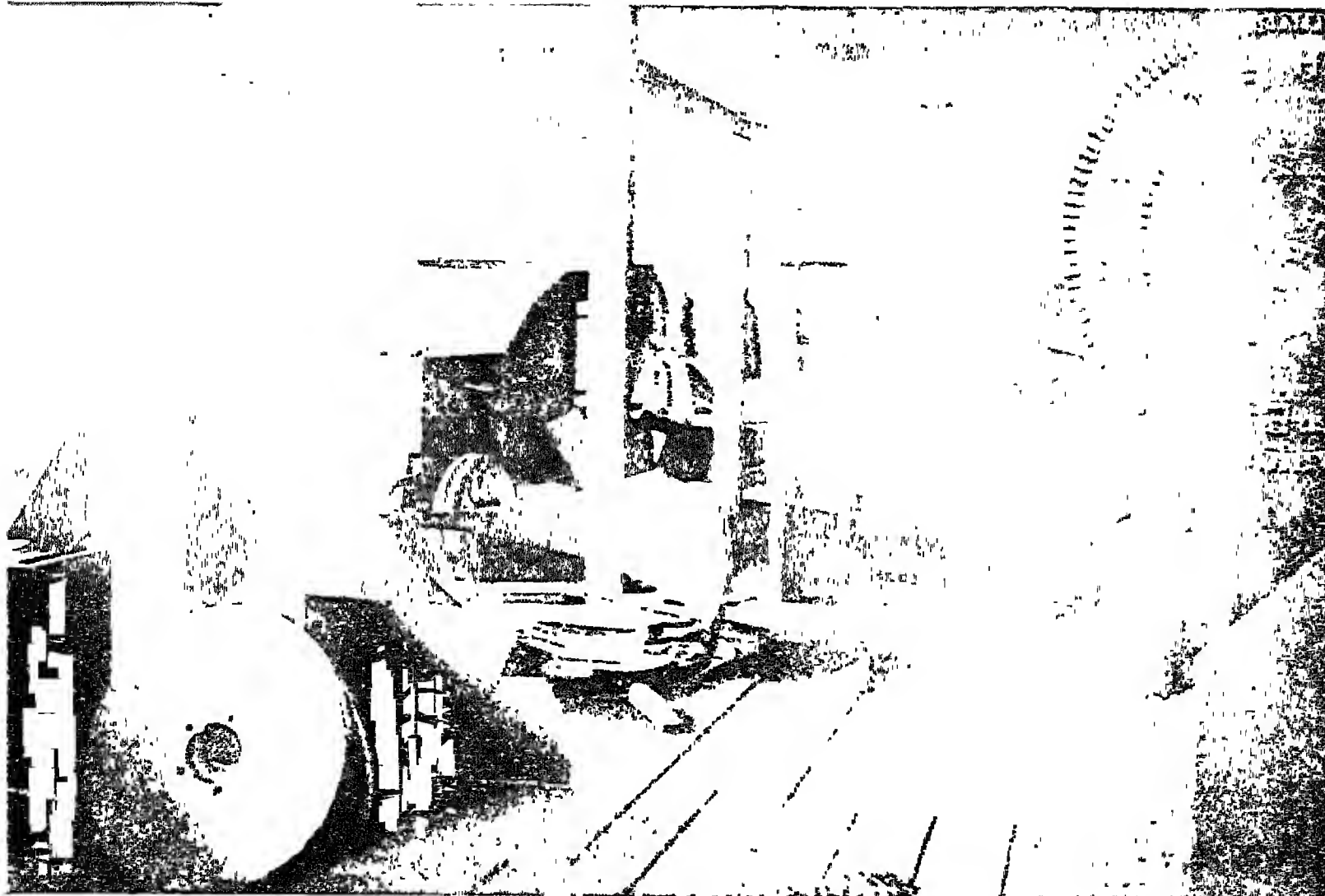
The toast was solemnly drunk. Rasputin continued in low, chanting monologue :

"I will bring them the deaths they have plotted for me. I have been looking at death tonight. I have had many visions of my death. A wise man looks often on his death so that when it appears to him he will not find it a stranger and take it unwittingly to his bosom."

His voice rose and he glowered around the table.

"Rasputin knows death too well to die easily. Let them be afraid, for God is not with them. He shall accomplish their undoing. Rasputin fears nothing until God shall call him."

I was a little taken aback at the suddenness of this outburst. After all, I was there on behalf of those enemies he was reviling,



Interior of Bratolyuboff's works.

40

100

100

100

100

but when I glanced cautiously at the others they seemed to be taking it all very quietly. So I concluded I was witnessing the witch-doctor at work. Oppression of the soul was being publicly wrestled with, and when another bottle or two of champagne had gone into him we should see it tossed around the room and thrown out of the window, perhaps.

But before this could happen there had to be another preliminary, a sentimental musical interlude to the Russian national longing for simplicity and peace, a wave of melancholy and self-pity, rumination on the beauty of everything dead and gone or otherwise unattainable. This is an inevitable stage in every Russian's painting of the town red. First the sentimental music, then the antidote, the gay stuff, and after that the riot begins and the damage goes on the bill. If the customer is not willing to pay for it the police are called.

The gipsies gathered close to our table. There were a dozen of them, eight men and four girls, the men in gaily brocaded shirts and trousers, the girls in coloured silk dresses with bright kerchiefs round their heads, vivid, dark-skinned creatures with burning eyes and jet-black hair. Rocking their voluptuous bodies from side to side, the women sang while the men drew forth the long, languorous shivers of native melody from their guitars. The room was hushed, the lights down. When the first song had ended and drifted into the next I stole a glance at Rasputin. He was leaning far back in his chair, his head resting on the top of it, his mouth twitching, and a tear trickling down his sallow cheek.

I had expected that when the melancholy became unendurable the gipsies would break without warning into their gay vein, but I did not know the ritual at the Villa Rode. The singing stopped. The most striking of the gipsy women was a girl of about twenty-five, with a yellow kerchief round her head, a lovely sinuous walk, small, flashing teeth, and large, sad-looking eyes which the smile that began brightly on her lips just feebly touched, dying like a spent wave disappearing into sand. She stood up in front of the band and clapped her hands. Immediately the head waiter produced a large goblet of champagne which he handed to her on a plate. Taking the plate in both hands she began to sing. It was a sweet, gay, plaintive and yearning song, a song of friendship, of the kinship of souls which are aware that there are barriers to the unity they desire, but feel that the pain of that knowledge makes every contact unendurably sweeter. It was a lovers' song, but in certain moods the Russian is in love with all the world, and this was one of them. The song, the girl, the music had their effect on me. I was in love with Russia, with all these people who could so surrender themselves to a dream.

When the last note had throbbed and died the gipsy remained motionless for a few seconds, her eyes on Rasputin, her lips opening in her sad, sweet smile, which was the perfect crown and comment on her song. Slowly she approached the table, holding the brimming glass on the plate before her with delicate poise. She stopped before Rasputin, who pulled himself to his feet with a slight unsteady sway. The marks of his tears were still visible on his cheeks and under them a hectic flush. He raised his arm, and the hand shook and twitched. The gipsy extended the plate and glass to him, but after a vain effort to take it he waved it away with some mumbled words and pointed to me.

"He's making you guest of honour. Drink it down, bow to her, and put the glass back upside down on the plate," whispered Bratolyouboff hastily, comprehending that I had no idea what I was supposed to do.

Rasputin had flopped back in his chair. The gipsy stopped in front of me. I put out my hand to take the glass. Before I could touch it, however, she drew it back with a low, anxious cry. She looked first at it and then at me with a startled expression as if she had just seen something about it or me, or both, which surprised her and made her afraid. For a few seconds she stood so, as if she continued to see things, seconds of acute embarrassment for me, for the attention of the whole company was fixed on us as we stood there, and then of a sudden she held out the plate to me again. I had scarcely touched the glass when a hoarse cry from Rasputin caused me to look round. He was hauling himself on to his feet, calling to me to stop, his hand waving loosely, frantically, in the air, his body half spread across the table, his mouth open, his features screwed up as if he were yelling with pain. People at the far end of the room jumped on to their chairs and waiters came running. Bratolyouboff jumped up at my side. Dumbfounded, I let my hand fall back from the glass, and the gipsy waited. Rasputin struggled to rise, and his elbow slipped on the table-top. Stuermer on the other side steadied him and helped him up. He swayed, tried to speak.

"Tell me"—he was mouthing the words at the gipsy—"if you want to live for another hour, tell me—what is it you saw about that man? What is it you saw in the glass?"

I looked from him to the gipsy girl, as did everyone in the room. My heart was pounding madly. I imagined the gipsy must have divined in some way with what intentions I was there. I was not afraid of my safety. Nothing very dangerous could happen to me in a room full of people. But it was mortifying to think that my attempt to ingratiate myself with the Rasputin clique was about to

be cut short before it had really a chance to begin. I saw myself exposed and shamed.

The girl showed no sign of alarm at Rasputin's bullying shout. She eyed the gasping man calmly for a space, then she put the plate and goblet carefully down on the table, smiled, and shook her head.

"It was nothing, little father, nothing at all at which you need be alarmed. There was something which I saw about this gentleman. But it means no ill to you or anyone."

She spoke in a quiet, soothing voice, letting her smile flow over into her words, as if chiding Rasputin gently for his absurd conduct, calming his fears. All eyes turned to the swaying, shivering figure up the table. He choked and leaned forward, waving his open fingers at her as if to pull her secret out of her unwilling mouth. He screamed again :

"I tell you, woman, speak what you saw ! This vision that you had of him, was it not death, Rasputin's death ?"

His terror had sobered him considerably. The gipsy smiled gently again.

"This man will not be the instrument of your death, little father. Nothing concerning that has been revealed to me."

A rustle of disappointment went round the room. My own lungs breathed a trifle more freely. Merely to be denounced as a spy would be a small anti-climax after this. Rasputin tried again, gently this time.

"Then it was nothing of me that you saw ? Speak, little sweetheart, if you will be so kind. My soul has been heavy all day with thoughts of death. I have many enemies, my child. I shall ask the Lady of Kazan to bless you if you will open your heart to me and tell me what made you seem afraid."

His tone was kind and wheedling, but the urgency of the clamour within him still showed in his eyes and the anxious twisting of his mouth.

The room craned forward to hear.

The girl spoke.

"It was nothing, little father. I saw the gentleman washing your dead body with water and warming it before a fire, that was all. At first I took the glass back because I was afraid to make what my eyes had seen come true. But I know it will come true whether he drinks of the glass or not."

Nobody moved. Nobody spoke.

Rasputin looked at the girl for what seemed a long time, his gaze changing perceptibly from the hard, steely intensity which he had called up for the act of listening to a dazed, dull, unseeing stare in which it was possible to see his stricken mind return with

infinite pain from the examination of things outside to its anguished contemplation of the hated fear within. In that moment I had some pity for Rasputin. He collapsed into his chair and sank his head on his hands.

The tension throughout the room relaxed audibly. There was an excited buzz of conversation from the crowds standing among the tables and on the chairs. Bratolyouboff put his hand on Rasputin's shoulder, and another man hastily poured out a glass of wine while Bratolyouboff pressed the stem of the glass into Rasputin's fingers and urged him to drink. Rasputin pushed the glass roughly aside, spilling the contents over Bratolyouboff's hand. He raised his head. His eyes were wet with tears.

Then to Bratolyouboff, piteously like a hurt child, he said: "Take me away from this place. I want to pray."

The party broke up at once. With Bratolyouboff and Stuermer supporting him on either side the tall Rasputin staggered through the spectators, who made way for him, and the rest of us closed in behind. The gipsy went back to her band. I followed out with the others because there was nothing else I could do, but no one spoke to me and I made no attempt to speak to them. On the street droshkies were called, and when Rasputin had been helped in Bratolyouboff came back to me where I stood on the pavement.

"Wait for me at your flat," he whispered. "I'll come there when he is through with me. It may be late, but wait."

They drove off and left me alone. Another droshky-driver hailed me, so I accepted his offer and drove back to my flat. The K—— family had all gone to bed, so I sat down to wait for Bratolyouboff to arrive.

About three in the morning Bratolyouboff's knock sounded on the door.

"It's all right," he said, and grinned broadly at the sight of my puzzled face. "He wants to see you tomorrow in the afternoon at his flat."

"What about?" I asked.

"Oh, he just wants to know you better now he knows your fates are linked. You might be interested yourself in the man who is to perform the last offices for you when your enemies have popped you off at last."

He laughed with sardonic irreverence.

"He can help you a lot if he takes a liking to you. He's a good sort when he's not drunk or preaching. Well, good-bye. Be sure you turn up."

He winked and ran down the stairs.

This Russia was certainly an amazing country.

CHAPTER VIII

RASPUTIN'S PLOT TO KILL A MILLION PEOPLE

ALL next day, until the hour for my interview with Rasputin came, the thought of him as a corpse and me performing the undertaker's office predicted for me by the gipsy lay heavy on my mind.

I reported my adventure and the invitation to Chaplinsky, who found it a grand joke. I was not usually superstitious myself, but the prospect of re-entering the presence of Rasputin, around whom so much occult mystery had already grown, with the hall-mark of this fresh mumbo-jumbo written indelibly on my face, was making me scared. I reached No. 64 Gorokhovaya Street, where Rasputin lived, just about four o'clock, but it took me another ten minutes to get up my courage to enter. At last I crossed the courtyard that led from the street, under an archway, and up the stairs. I was met on the landing by a couple of men who barred my way and demanded my business. They were the agents of the secret police who guarded Rasputin night and day at the express instruction of the Empress. My timid knock on the door was answered by an elderly woman, and I was shown through a small hall into a very barely furnished waiting-room. I had scarcely been waiting a minute when the door opened and Rasputin himself entered.

He was all new again. The dress was the same, except that the blouse was white instead of pale blue and was decorated with small flowers. The hair and beard were as neatly combed as they had been when he had first appeared at the Villa Rode, and the complexion was just as pale, the features just as coarse. But this figure was strong and erect, the beady eyes sparkled at me from the depths of their sockets, and the thick lips were parted in a large, welcoming smile.

"It was kind of you to come, my son," he began, and his voice was soft and smooth. "Come into my bedroom, where we can talk as friends."

I followed him into a small room containing a low divan, a desk, a table, and a couple of chairs. He motioned to me to sit down on the bed while he stood facing me, his legs apart, his hands clasped behind his back. He regarded me in silence for a moment, his eyes looking intently into mine. The stare I had received last

night had been dead, the useless inebriate peering of eyes that see but do not comprehend very much. This glance was alive, not as steady as I would have expected, for it looked and looked away, returning almost stealthily again as if to catch one off one's guard, but it was looking with intent to see. I had lost my nervousness, however, as soon as he had asked me to sit down, so I was able to endure the scrutiny with exactly the combination of politeness and carelessness which I thought was required.

He began the conversation by asking me about my father and mother, then about my Army training and my work at Tsarskoe Selo. He asked me for a detailed description of the sensations of flight. He had a peasant's curiosity about the phenomenon. He was intrigued with the idea of being in the air and seemed impressed by my account of the feeling of freedom and power, the increase of one's being, which comes of easy movement through the air, and was delighted as a child with my impressions of flying over the majestic scenery of the clouds. When I spoke of power he referred to the devil showing Christ the kingdoms of the earth from the mountain-top. But in the next breath he was asking about the bomb as a weapon of war. Had I ever dropped a bomb? Had I ever seen a city bombed from the air? Would it be possible for the Germans to bomb Petrograd? When I said that Zeppelins might be flown over Petrograd, but that the distance was too great to be practicable for an attack by bombing 'planes, he inquired what defences we had against a Zeppelin attack. Were we always prepared? I answered all his questions with complete simplicity and directness. There was really nothing to conceal, and to be genuine and simple I believed to be the essence of my part.

He sat down on the bed beside me.

"I can see you have a sweet nature, my dear, and I would like to have you for a friend. In my work for Russia I have need of many friends. Will you come to see me often? Please say yes. I need the conversation of the young."

I said I would be glad to come as often as he wished. At that moment Katya, the elderly maid, interrupted to announce another caller, so I took my leave. He insisted on embracing me at the door, and with further exhortations to call again soon I passed the sentinels on the stair and raced out into the open air. My first private interview with Rasputin was actually over and I had been admitted to the circle of his friends. No reference at all had been made to the incident of last night, for which I heaved a sigh of deep relief. I reported the conversation to Chaplinsky, who seemed pleased and told me to follow it up soon.

But before I had time to call again the scandal of Bratolyuboff

arose. I heard about it first from the K——s. Bratolyouboff had been at the flat in a state of wild indignation and dismay. Polivanoff, the new War Minister, was the cause of it. Apparently Bratolyouboff had put in certain requisitions for his experiments and Polivanoff had turned them down. More than that, he had sent a high official of the Ministry to Government Headquarters at Mogileff to denounce Bratolyouboff to the Tsar. This was not surprising when it was learned just what Bratolyouboff's new requisitions had been. He had demanded fourteen million roubles in cash (about one and a half million pounds) and all the vacant property and sites in Petrograd. Next day Bratolyouboff was arrested. I was instructed by Chaplinsky to find out what the Rasputin camp was saying.

When I called at Gorokhovaya Street I found Rasputin was at Tsarskoe Selo, but waiting his return were Stuermer and Manouiloff, and when Stuermer heard me talking to Katya he came out and invited me in. It was my first meeting with Manouiloff. He was dark, Jewish-looking in rather a handsome way, under medium height, and wore a monocle which he screwed at intervals ostentatiously into his eye. At all other times he kept the lids of his eyes almost half closed. The conversation turned naturally to Bratolyouboff. Stuermer said his release was expected at any moment. Rasputin had gone to see the Empress at Tsarskoe Selo. Polivanoff, he declared, would suffer for this. The General was making a nuisance of himself in other ways. He was working much too closely with the committee of business men and others set up some months before by the Duma with the approval of the Tsar to speed up the manufacture of munitions. Stuermer was specially incensed about this co-operation between the War Minister and a pack of interfering busybodies, as he termed them. The whole machinery of the State was being undermined. Not merely were there members of the hated district and town councils on this committee as well as business and professional men, but Guchkoff, the chairman, was even co-opting working men from the factories on to the sub-committees. The bureaucracy was being pushed on one side. If this were allowed to continue the foundations of the Tsardom would be weakened and would never recover.

He was a round-faced, beetle-browed fellow, this Stuermer, with a big, drooping moustache, a German who had become a naturalized Russian shortly before the war, but to hear him talk of the autocracy, one would have believed that his ancestors must at least have been Russian since the days of Peter the Great. When a telephone message came through to say that Rasputin was staying the night at Tsarskoe Selo we all left.

Next day Bratolyouboff was released. The next news was that

the old nonentity, Goremykin, who had been in office as Prime Minister since before the war, had at last been allowed to resign. The Liberal Ministers in the Cabinet had long wanted him to go, but the Empress had refused. She had no suitable successor to propose and to replace him by a progressive was unthinkable. Now a successor had been found and it was none other than my companion of the Villa Rode, Stuermer, late German subject, defender of the autocracy, and Rasputin's tool. This was Rasputin's answer to Polivanoff. If the Ministers would not listen to his dictation from outside the Cabinet the Rasputin whip would be cracked at them from inside. One month after his appointment as Prime Minister Stuermer had also become Minister of the Interior in the room of Hvostoff, dismissed. In the following month Polivanoff was struck down. Stuermer had not quite the effrontery to take over the War Office, but an old dotard general, Shuvaieff, got the appointment, which was every bit as bad. The next to go was Sazonoff, Foreign Minister, and friend of the Allies from the beginning, and Stuermer, German and pro-German, combined that important office with the two he already held. The Empress and Rasputin were now undisputed masters of the field. As for the Tsar, he had ceased to exist.

In all this excitement I hung on gamely to the position chance had created for me on the remote outskirts of the Rasputin cabal. I had managed to become fairly friendly with Manouiloff, and Manouiloff had become Stuermer's private secretary and a man of great power. For the first time in his life he was in a position to see his dreams of money fulfilled. It was not merely for his information that the millionaires and the concession-hunters entertained him now. They had to court his favour in order to be allowed to live. The great source of profit for all of them was the war, and the decision as to who was to make the profits out of the war rested now with the triumvirate, Rasputin, Stuermer, and Manouiloff, and the decision inevitably went to the profiteer who was willing to buy his privilege at the highest price. Rasputin had no longer need to rob the treasury through people like Bratolyuboff. He could sell the right to rob it to others and he did. I listened to all the gossip I could hear and sent in my reports. And at long last I made a discovery which set Rak on the track of the evidence of Rasputin's trafficking with the Germans which he desired and for which I had been planted in the camp.

It was during the period of General Brusiloff's successful offensive in 1916, when the Germans were seriously afraid that the Russian steam-roller was really beginning to roll. An attempt had already been made to stem the advance by getting rid of Brusiloff himself.



Gregory Rasputin, who admitted Mr. Blair to his intimate circle because of a gipsy's prophecy that the Scotsman would perform certain rites for him after his death. It was because he believed in this prophecy and wished to prolong his own life as well as Mr Blair's that Rasputin warned him to leave Petrograd, thereby enabling him to uncover a German plot to destroy the population of the Tsarist capital by means of disease germs brought from America.

Poison had been introduced into his coffee, but the fatal cup had been drunk by his adjutant in mistake. There were signs of alarm in the Rasputin circle and I had reason to believe that pressure to do something drastic was being put on them from the German side.

One evening I was with a party of Rasputin's friends when one of the women, in the course of conversation, asked me where I was going when I left Petrograd. I looked at her in some surprise. I said I had no intention of leaving Petrograd.

"Hasn't Gregory Efimovitch [Rasputin] told you, then?" she asked.

"Told me what?"

"Why, about leaving Petrograd. I thought he would have told you. He likes you. He has positively insisted on my going. I'm going to Yalta."

"But I still don't understand what you mean."

She laughed.

"Neither do I really. But something's going to happen. I asked you because I thought you might know."

This was mysterious, but she became afraid she had said too much, and when I pressed for more information referred me to Rasputin himself.

I found Rasputin at home the following evening, alone and resting, before going out to pay a visit. He said he was glad to see me because there was something very important he wanted to say to me. After a few questions about our respective healths—he was in one of his nervous feminine moods, full of solicitation for others and tortured about himself—he asked me if it were possible for me to arrange a transfer to Mogileff. I protested that I did not want to be transferred to Mogileff. He put his hand on my arm.

"My son, do as I ask you. Go to Mogileff."

"But why should I go to Mogileff, Gregory Efimovitch? There is no one I know in Mogileff. All my friends are here. I like being stationed so near to Petrograd."

He patted my arm.

"I know, my son. I have been glad to have you beside me. But there will be tragedy soon in Petrograd. It will be better that you should go."

I was genuinely surprised at the earnestness of his tone.

"Why, Father, you talk as if something were going to happen to you."

He smiled and patted my arm again.

"There is no need to worry over me. I have had a warning and if I heed it I shall be safe. But I wish my dearest friends to be safe

with me. So be guided by me, my dear, and go. If you have any difficulty in arranging it, let me know."

I had no need to pretend worry.

"But won't you tell me what it is I have to fear? Must I go now, at once?"

"No, not at once. My warning will come to me again and I shall tell you. As for what is to be feared, I myself have not been told. My dream was dark and strange like the warnings given to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Only the warning was clear—leave Petrograd. Will you promise me, my dear?"

I gave him my promise and said that as it might take some little time to arrange a transfer to General Headquarters I had better apply immediately, with which he agreed. I asked what Manouiloff intended to do.

"Manouiloff has business in Sweden which will keep him some time there. I have warned him not to come back until we know what the danger is which threatens."

"And you, Gregory Efimovitch, where will you go to be safe?"

"To Pokrovskoe. To my shrine of Our Lady of Kazan to receive her counsel."

I went straight to Manouiloff, who by good luck was also at home. He was, in fact, saying good-bye to a visitor and I was introduced. It was a certain Professor Rogoff, of the Samara University, whom I had heard of as a friend of Rasputin but had never met before. I went straight to the point of my call. Why was Rasputin so keen for me to leave Petrograd? Manouiloff protested that he knew no more than I. Apparently Rasputin was warning all his friends. According to Manouiloff he had been told exactly the same as I had myself. I learned he was not leaving for Sweden for at least a fortnight.

My next call was on Rak to tell him what had happened. He agreed that there was evidently something very mysterious afoot. I mentioned having met Professor Rogoff and Rak said he would give instructions that the Professor should be looked into. It was decided that I should not apply for the transfer to Mogileff, and if Rasputin found out, I was to explain that I was awaiting the return of my Colonel who was at Mogileff himself at that moment. Rak's theory was that the danger Rasputin feared for his friends was political. Petrograd in the grip of a political storm could be a very unhealthy place. Suppose Rasputin had arranged to stage a revolution and troops were ordered from the front to put it down? Mutiny would probably result. The line would be broken and the Germans could sweep in. The consequences were unforeseeable, and it would be just the idea that would present itself to the clever mind of

Manouiloff or some German to break the back of the pro-Ally progressives with the very weapon of revolution which they feared to use on their own behalf, in case in so doing they should demoralize the front and let the Allies down. On the other hand, the danger might be a simple Zeppelin raid. We had heard of the bombs dropped on London.

The investigation was really off my beat now to a large extent, but Rak was good enough to keep me in touch with it. In a few days I learned that the plot that was being prepared was not political. It was something much more diabolical, and my chance meeting with Professor Rogoff had supplied the clue.

This Professor Rogoff had been looked into, and it had been discovered that his chief activity for the previous week had been the collecting of live rats. The number stored at his laboratory was abnormal even for the research work of a bacteriologist. If there was a connection between Rogoff's rat-collecting and Rasputin's warning it could have only one significance—that the rats were to be used to infect the unsuspecting population of Petrograd with some deadly disease. It was not inconceivable. Spreading disease on the home front had been discussed as a possible weapon in a modern war. Some of the members of Counter-Espionage were for arresting Rogoff and confiscating his rats without delay. Rak was disposed to wait, at least until Rasputin gave his friends the signal to flee. The next discovery was that Professor Rogoff had ordered a number of large metal boxes of special design. These were obviously intended to be the containers in which the infected rats were to be carried to the points at which they were to be released. If possible, Rogoff should be arrested in the very act of proceeding to introduce his rats into the sewers. Then if Rasputin, Manouiloff, Stuermer, and all the gang were already out of the town, the proof was complete and the material for the grand denunciation of Rasputin of which his enemies had been dreaming for months was in their hands. Rogoff was being watched night and day.

Then a curious thing happened. While we were still waiting for Rogoff to move, a warning was received from the British Intelligence in New York that a man known to be a German agent working in America had left for Archangel on the S.S. *Vologda*, bearing a letter of introduction to Professor Rogoff. Three weeks passed while the *Vologda* was at sea. The boxes had been delivered, but still Rogoff made no move. The conclusion to be drawn was that the German agent was probably bringing the disease germs. It was confirmed when the *Vologda* arrived at Archangel. Among the German agent's luggage was a sealed box of bacteriological specimens for Professor Rogoff of which he was taking extraordinary care.

The German agent, whose name was Gregersen, was carefully shadowed from Archangel to Petrograd, and on the evening of his arrival a meeting was held at Manouiloff's house. Rasputin, Manouiloff, Rogoff, and Gregersen were present. I was hourly expecting the message from Rasputin which would tell me to leave for Mogileff.

Meanwhile, Rak's men haunted Rogoff's laboratory. It was impossible for him to leave it without being seen. Rak had a car constantly ready to convey him anywhere he should be required. For two days Rogoff was shut up in his laboratory, leaving it neither for sleep nor meals, and it seemed that the zero hour must now be at hand. Discreet inquiries among Rogoff's laboratory staff produced the information that he had given instructions that he was not to be disturbed, and these instructions were being scrupulously obeyed.

Still nothing happened. Then on the evening of the third day a message came to Rak. One of the Professor's assistants had dared to break the laboratory door in and had found the Professor dead on the floor. A broken vessel and a cut finger told the tale. Professor Rogoff had accidentally smashed Gregerson's sealed specimens and had died of bubonic plague.

CHAPTER IX

A PLOT TO KIDNAP THE TSARINA

FATE was probably very satisfied with the neat trick she had played on Professor Rogoff, but she had handed out a bitter disappointment to the Counter-Espionage. We had been left without proof of even the existence of the plot—no proof, at least, out of which Rasputin and his associates could not have wriggled with ease.

The plan was now to use all the evidence which was available for a mass attack in the Duma in which Stuermer and Rasputin would both be denounced from all sides of the House, in the belief that the Tsar could not ignore the demonstration of a nation-wide public opinion which such an attack would afford. The difficulty was to get the Duma summoned together, since meetings of the Duma were anathema to the Stuermer Cabinet, but at last the Duma was summoned for November 14.

It was a day of great excitement in Petrograd. The Tauride Palace—the meeting-place of the Duma—was crowded with representatives and spectators. When the opening ceremony was over, Stuermer and his ministers showed their attitude to this constitutional gathering of the nation's delegates by rising and walking out. But the delegates were not perturbed. Milyukoff, leader of the Liberal Party, began the attack. His speech consisted of a damning list of the efforts of the Stuermer government to frustrate the Army and the people in their determination to win the war. He gave chapter and verse for each indictment, and concluded each item on his list with the thundered question: "Is this folly or is it treason?" The Palace building resounded with the members' roars of anger.

He was followed on the rostrum by the Conservative, Shulgin, who supported the denunciation in equally strong terms. Pourishkevitch, autocrat of autocrats and a passionate anti-Semite who had earned a reputation before the war as the cleverest reactionary in all Russia and a fervent defender of the Romanoff rule, was the next to take the floor. Pourishkevitch's attitude was eagerly awaited. It was remembered that at the meeting of an earlier Duma, when criticisms of a former Ministry had been almost as violent, it was he who had had the effrontery to confound the

proceedings by rising and singing "God Save the Tsar", in which it would have been little less than open treason not to have joined. He opened his speech now with two quietly spoken but shattering words : "Hofmeister Stuermer . . ."

There was no need for him to say more. The tone of bitter scorn in which he publicly branded the Prime Minister with the German title of his office which had been a whispered catch-phrase in the cafés for months made his position amply clear. The Tauride Palace rocked with the applause. He went on to condemn Rasputin as the evil genius of Russia and frankly denounced him as a German spy.

When the speeches were reported to them, Stuermer and Rasputin were wild with fury. The Empress was speechless with rage. She considered the attack from the Duma to be an outrage and an insult to herself, and appealed to the Tsar to dissolve the Duma at once and have the speakers arrested. Hurried councils were held, but a certain wisdom prevailed. A sop was thrown to the public agitation. Stuermer was dismissed and a Conservative named Trepoff against whom the public had no complaint was made Prime Minister in his place. Rasputin was strong as ever. Stuermer was no loss. Rasputin and the Empress had found a new strong man named Protopopoff, whom they made Minister of the Interior.

This was the political situation early in December 1916 when I attended a meeting of selected members of the Counter-Espionage Service in a room at the offices of the Physical Development Commission. Rak opened the proceedings with the announcement that in the matter of Rasputin, in his opinion the time had come to take the law into our own hands. It was possible, he said, to remove Rasputin in a plain straightforward way. That is to say, he could be poisoned, shot, stabbed, or bombed in the good old Russian fashion. The disadvantage of simple assassination, however, was that all its results were likely to be of the wrong kind. The Empress would retaliate, of course, and there were enough of Rasputin's friends and supporters to make it possible for her to carry out her will.

If the retaliation were too severe revolution might follow, but in such a form that its consequences would be unpredictable. Once it had begun there was little doubt that it would end successfully, but it might be some time before the outcome was clear and the intervening stages might seriously prejudice Russia's chance of holding her own in the war. He thought none of us would disagree with the statement, he went on, that a revolution which would substitute a limited constitutional monarchy for the present intolerable regime was to be desired. It should be our aim, therefore, in removing Rasputin from the scene, to do it in such a way that a speedy and successful revolution would follow. Consequently, Rasputin's death



The Tsarina, the body of whose dead favourite Rasputin was exhumed by Mr. Blair and destroyed in extraordinary fulfilment of a gipsy fortune-teller's prophecy.

must be accomplished at the point where it could act as a match on ready tinder, and be sure of obtaining the greatest and most important support. According to his analysis of all the possibilities, Rak continued, that point was at the front (*a*) where hatred of Rasputin and all he stood for was most intense, (*b*) where the greatest military strength was gathered and (*c*) where it was possible to carry out a revolution with the advantage of military discipline behind it.

The plan which he laid before us was to lure Rasputin in some way to the front, stage a rising of the soldiers against him in which he would be murdered, and then march with the same force to headquarters to the Tsar and demand that he set up a new Ministry pledged to use all Russia's resources and energies to promote a speedy conclusion to the war. The Tsar would find himself isolated since even the Grand Dukes were in favour of a new pro-war Cabinet, nobody at the front was likely to wish to avenge the death of Rasputin, and a speedy termination of the war was exactly the thing for which officers and men alike were longing with all their souls. With the whole army supporting the demand, the Tsar must give way and the revolution would be over almost before it had begun. The Empress and Protopopoff would have the ground cut from under their feet. The death of Rasputin could become a spark to light all Russia if accomplished in this way.

Rak's enthusiasm for his own plan was infectious. If revolution was the only way out there was much to be said for his idea. I could see only one big difficulty about putting it into execution. Knowing Rasputin as I did, I could not see how it was going to be possible to lure him to the front, for he knew he was almost universally hated there, and I could think of nothing that would induce him to pay it a visit. But when I mentioned this obstacle to Rak he pointed out that it was to overcome just such difficulties that we had been called together.

We cudgelled our brains for the next hour. Someone suggested that he might be drawn by a faked message from the Tsar commanding his presence, but that was vetoed by Rak because, as he pointed out, Rasputin would be certain to consult the Empress and she would want to know what the object of the visit was before allowing him to travel. He said also that he considered it would be unwise to bring the name of the Tsar in any way into the plot. But next moment he contradicted his own view, for apparently the suggestion had given him another idea.

"Why shouldn't we send him a message saying that the Tsar is very ill and needing his help?" he asked, and pulled the ends of his moustache down until they almost met under his lower lip.

"But that would also send him flying to the Empress, and she would go too."

"And why not?" purred Rak. "Let's have the she-bear in the trap as well."

"And kill her too?"

"No, no," replied Rak with a smile. "Hold her as a hostage for the Emperor's good behaviour. At least, we could keep her out of the way until the Emperor had capitulated. It would save trouble, too, in Petrograd without her being there to stir up anything."

He slapped his leg.

"Damn it, but I like that idea!"

It was, of course, exactly the sort of idea which would appeal to Rak at first thought. Eventually a complete plan was tabled.

This was the outline of it, in which, since I could fly, I had a key part. I was to be transferred to General Headquarters at Mogileff and when everything was ready I would receive orders to take despatches by air to another part of the front. As soon as I was out of sight of Mogileff I would turn round and fly my machine back to Tsarskoe Selo. There I would ask to see the Empress and inform her that the Tsar was gravely ill and that I had been sent to request her to leave at once in secret for Mogileff. I should be furnished with the proper credentials, so there would be no question of my story not being believed. The Empress would be as keen as we to prevent the news of the Tsar's illness from leaking out, but there was one person whom she would undoubtedly insist on taking with her—Rasputin the healer. On the journey to Mogileff the Imperial train would break down, the Empress would disappear, and Rasputin would be whisked off to a part of the lines near to Mogileff where the officers would be prepared for his coming. That, in brief, was the plan as settled at the first meeting.

The next step was for Rak to proceed to the front and sound the army commanders who were likely to fall in with the plan. He was absent for nearly three weeks, but when he returned he was able to say that everything had been arranged. The plot had been made known only to a small number of officers whom he knew he could trust, not only to keep the secret until the right moment, but to act swiftly and effectively when the time arrived. The arrangements had been carefully made to ensure that all action should be confined to troops in the rear and precautions were to be taken to prevent any troops leaving the front lines. The coup would be carried out on a date to be arranged towards the end of January. Before that date efforts would be made to involve a number of the senior officers in the plot, including some of the members of the High Command.

It all sounds a little crazy and Ruritanian today, perhaps, but

the more I reflected on it in those days the sounder it seemed as a way of cutting the knot which was holding Russia bound. It transpired, however, that we were not alone in considering that in this matter of Rasputin, as Rak had put it, the time had come for taking the law into our own hands.

On the first day of the New Year I was sprucing myself up after lunch to go off to Petrograd for the afternoon when K——, who had been on guard-duty at the Palace throughout the forenoon, burst into our coupé and plumped himself down in front of me with his mouth wide open and his eyes jumping out of his head.

“P-prepare to be shot !” he stuttered. “Rasputin’s dead !”

I had no need to ask him how he had got his news. He was bubbling over with it.

“Protopopoff telephoned the Empress. Rasputin’s missing. Hasn’t been home since last night. Nobody’s seen him or knows where he is. But he went out with Prince Youssoupoff last night and a policeman outside Youssoupoff’s house heard shots, and when he went to investigate a man told him Rasputin had been killed and gave him a hundred roubles to keep it quiet. Protopopoff’s sure Rasputin’s been murdered. The Empress is in a faint. Somebody telephoned Vyroubova* at the same time and she’s at the Palace now telling everybody that the end of the world has come. And it sounds like it up there.”

I had to get him to repeat it all over again. There was no reason to question the facts he was able to give. This much was sure—Protopopoff would never have telephoned the Empress announcing his fear that Rasputin was dead unless he had the very best ground for believing that his fear would be confirmed. To have erred in this matter would have been more than even Protopopoff’s place was worth. There was nothing to be done except go to Petrograd and learn all I could.

It was evident at once in Petrograd that the news was already all over the place. Excited groups were discussing it in the streets and there was no doubt regarding their mood. They were definitely rejoicing. At the General Staff offices I learned that Rak had left half an hour earlier for Mogileff and concluded that he was hurrying there either to stop or to save what he could of his plot. Chaplinsky amplified K——’s account a little. Prince Youssoupoff had been interrogated by the police and had denied all knowledge of Rasputin’s movements, explaining the shots which had been heard as having been fired by a drunken guest at a dog.

It appeared that when the policeman came to investigate at the house, Pourishkevitch, the Duma member, had told him they

* Madame Vyroubova, the Empress’s confidante.

had killed Rasputin, but Youssoupoff now explained this by saying that Pourishkevitch had declared he wished it were Rasputin and not a dog which had been shot. Nobody was believing anything, of course. Everybody was convinced that Youssoupoff and his friends had shot Rasputin and thrown the body in the river somewhere. The Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch was also implicated, and the police were uncertain how to proceed because of the connection of the Grand Duke and Prince Youssoupoff with the Imperial House. A rising had also been threatened if the conspirators, who had become popular heroes in an hour, should be arrested. A group of factory workers had offered to guard Youssoupoff's house. Makaroff, Minister of Justice, had sent a telegram to the Tsar asking for instructions. Meanwhile, the search for the body was going on.

Two days later, amid great excitement, Rasputin's body was found under the ice in the Neva some distance from the Petrovsky Bridge over which it obviously had been thrown, and a post-mortem was begun and stopped by the order of the Empress. The body was brought to Tsarskoe Selo to be buried.

From the moment I had first heard of the death of Rasputin I had thought of nothing else but the prophecy of the gipsy at the Villa Rode. I was like a man guilty of murder walking the streets, expecting an arresting hand to fall on his shoulder at every step. I followed all the news of the search for and the discovery of the body with a dreadful foreboding. Somewhere, somehow, I knew I should be called in and the fulfilment of the gipsy's prophecy would begin. I thought of the ugly details of her vision and was sick inside. I went through hours and hours of this terror of waiting for the call to come. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. When at length Rasputin's body was stowed safely in the tomb and I had not been called, I heaved a sigh of the profoundest relief.

But little did I know to what fantastic lengths a gipsy's prophecy can go.

CHAPTER X

AN EMPIRE FALLS IN PREPARATION

It required the dethronement of the Tsar of All the Russias to give that gipsy her chance. For three months the main topic of conversation everywhere had been when, how, and where the revolution would begin. All the Russians I knew seemed as agreed about the inevitability of revolution as they were about the inevitability of death. But, like death, no one knew when or how it was coming, and though they all talked so much about it, no one seemed to wish to know, and no one was lifting a finger to bring it nearer. It was as if a fire were burning somewhere in the bowels of the earth which would one day reach a gigantic powder-magazine and blow it to the sky, but no one knew where the fuse ran or where the magazine lay. All that they were sure of was that the last period had been entered upon and that the fuse had been lit and could never now be put out.

Even in Tsarskoe Selo officers spoke openly of the days to come when the Romanoffs would be removed. A year before when they had spoken of a new Russia most of them had had in mind something to come when the war was over, but there was a deep conviction among all of them now that victory was impossible under the existing regime and revolution would have to come first. But not one among them showed the least desire to accelerate its coming by a day. The fuse was lit, the ball was rolling, events were shaping themselves, and God and history would make the day.

This was the mood of intellectual Russia from the death of Rasputin to March 1917. There were signs of God's fingers stirring among the Petrograd masses, however. The people were hungry, physically hungry. For nearly a year famine in Petrograd had been looming ahead. The railway system was in chaos. Since the beginning of the war, engines had been wearing out and the vices of the Government had prevented their being replaced. The Government had refused to pay the locomotive manufacturers prices which would pay them to work. Consequently, the manufacture and repair of locomotives had ceased altogether. In the same way the bureaucrats had declined to make reasonable contracts for the purchase of coal and depended on requisitions. Consequently, the railways were

supplied with bad coal and the engines still in commission were being ruined. With the failure of railway transport the workers in the industrial regions could get neither food nor work. In the Donetz area half the big blast furnaces had closed down and the rest were working half-time. In Petrograd the Putilov and other big munition works were in a ferment because the workers could not get bread. Strikes were taking place every week. The Petrograd municipality petitioned the Government to be allowed to take over the feeding of the population and the Government refused. The Moskowski regiment was ordered to fire on strikers and declined. Five officers were cashiered and fifteen men were hanged. When a regiment of cavalry was ordered from Novgorod to Petrograd to keep order for the assembly of the Duma the officers begged to be sent to the front rather than be required to defend the Government in the capital, and when the Council of Empire met the porters refused to lay fires to warm them until they had first been supplied with bread. The great explosion was surely drawing near.

Then Rak returned with reports from the front. The soldiers were tired of war, disgusted with the Government, fed-up with everything. The Emperor had been warned by his commanders that the troops would probably refuse to fight if the Government were not changed, but he seemed bereft of what fragments of decision he had ever possessed. The Empress and her new favourite, Protopopoff, were waiting for the revolution to break out like everyone else, only they intended to crush it smartly and for ever—though it was doubtful on what forces they expected to be able to rely apart from the Cossacks and the police. Rak was certain that no troops from the front would return to quell a revolution in the rear. If they were moved from the front they would almost certainly desert to their homes.

“But what,” I asked, “do you expect will happen if a revolution does take place in the rear?”

“The lost morale may be regained if the soldiers have a government they can trust.”


“But isn’t it a terrible risk that the break-up might come before a new government could get control?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Perhaps. But what can we do now? You can’t stop a glacier on the move.”

The metaphor was in the air.

Within a week of this talk the awaited Russian revolution had begun. For several days striking workmen had been demonstrating in the streets of Petrograd and there had been scuffles between them and the Cossacks and police. On the Saturday, March 10, the




Government proclaimed martial law, but the crowds defied the order and on Sunday evening marched through the city shouting, "Down with the Emperor!" The same evening a company of the Pavlovski regiment fired on the police and were disarmed and confined in the Preobrashenski barracks. Next morning the Preobrashenski and Volinski regiments mutinied and marched through the streets to the War Ministry. An order signed by the Tsar appeared proroguing the Duma which was sitting, but the members refused to be dispersed and a delegation of the mutineers went to the Duma. During the afternoon a "Temporary Committee for the Preservation of Order" representing all parties in the Duma, including the Socialists, but excluding the extreme right, was set up, and a revolution was in being.

The trouble was to be sure whether this was the real revolution or not. It was true that it was all obviously in the drift of the stream. But the position was a complicated one for the officers of the regiments in and around Petrograd and the disadvantages of the policy of drift became apparent at once. If the mutiny of the regiments were God's doing, He was showing His hand in a distressingly awkward manner, for how could He expect officers and gentlemen to follow a lead set by their own mutinous men? It was unimaginative, to say the least. Set down thus, the dilemma in which most of my fellow officers found themselves in that second week of March sounds irreverent, but it was real and acute. If they joined the men and the revolt failed, they would be condemned, not as revolutionaries, but only as mutineers. They had to be sure before they allowed themselves to slip over the edge that this really was Niagara which had been reached and not a small rapid which would tumble them about and break their skulls. They had foreseen the revolution as coming with a torrent force and an authority which no one could fail to recognize, and they were dismayed to find the politicians ready to hail this plebeian turbulence as the thing. It was disconcerting, too, to discover that one was not being swept over but had to will oneself to jump.

I had not been in Petrograd on the day on which the revolt began, but K—— had, and he returned in the evening full of the news. A visit to other messes revealed the predicament I have outlined above. Our Colonel was for marching on Petrograd at once, but could find nobody to give him the orders. Most of us were of the opinion that the men would refuse to obey. The news from the palace was that the Empress was talking in whispers and looked scared and that Protopopoff had disappeared but that troops to quell the rising were being sent from the front.

For the first time I realized the significance of class-consciousness



in the world. If the revolt had begun above them or on their own level those fellow officers of mine would have fallen in line with it as readily as any. But because the initiation had come from below, because it meant a loss of supposed dignity to join a movement which the common soldiers had begun, because they felt that the social order was being disturbed, in spite of their frequent assertions that a match struck anywhere would set all Russia aflame, they preferred to take the risk of the match being blown out or of the flames overwhelming themselves than accept a torch offered to them by a lower-class hand. I had a glimpse in that moment of other struggles besides the struggle against Tsardom arising in the making of a new Russia, and I had a horrid suspicion that the hoped-for revolution was beginning with a big mistake.

But while we had been discussing our position in the officers' messes the men in the barracks had been discussing theirs, and early on the next morning they made plain to us what their attitude was to be. Before he had even had his breakfast a deputation called on the Colonel of the squadron and informed him that in conjunction with the other regiments attached to the Imperial Guard and stationed in the town they proposed to declare for the revolution. Politely and respectfully they suggested that the officers should follow suit. The Colonel's reply was to send them back to their barracks and to order the whole squadron to parade at once. We paraded on the landing-field. The men seemed sullen and heavy, but they fell in obediently enough and waited the Colonel's appearance in the usual stiff silence. He had previously ordered a platform to be wheeled into position, and this he mounted at once and began to speak. It was obvious that he was making an effort to keep himself under control, avoiding his usual bluster and aiming as far as he was able at tones of cold contempt. His declaration was that no officer of the Russian army could be expected to associate himself with the rabble which was behaving so ridiculously in Petrograd, and that any man of his squadron who dared to express any further opinion in favour of this miserable mutiny would be shot. Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when a man in the front line of my company not three paces away from me stepped out in front of the ranks, knelt down, raised his rifle, and shot him through the head. It happened so quickly there was not the slightest chance to interfere, and before I could speak or move, the man was on his feet again and had stepped in front of me and placed his rifle in my hand without a word. Apart from him, not a man had moved ; but I could feel the eyes of the whole squadron on us as I stood there holding the soldier's rifle awkwardly in my hand and wondering stupidly what on earth I was supposed to do.

I realized the soldier was handing me the gun as a token that with this murder all necessary scores had been paid. It was the squadron's reply to what the Colonel had just said—and what he had been. With that over, we could be friends, all the rest of us, and begin. It was a Russian gesture of brotherhood, and on how I accepted or rejected it might depend a dozen officers' lives. That the squadron knew its mind and meant business was plain.

"Why have you done this?" I asked.

Immediately the peasant's stolid, childlike face broke into the softest grin imaginable and he leaned forward until his face was close to mine and whispered :

"Russia is free !"

My sneaking sympathy with him dissolved in a flood of anger. I had hated the Colonel too, but he was a man, and this brute had shot him down in cold blood.

"So that's what you call freedom, is it? To murder everybody of whom you're afraid? Well, if that's your idea of revolution, carry on. You'd better murder me too !"—and I held the rifle out to him.

I spoke without thought. If he had shot me the next instant the crack of the rifle would have capped exactly the fury of my mind. But he grinned as broadly and pressed the rifle back in my hand.

"Don't worry, brother, no one will shoot you. We want you to go to Petrograd to take our message to the Duma that the Tsar's Flying Corps is with the revolution too."

There was a murmur of approval from the men behind me, the first sound they had made since coming on parade. I was taken aback.

"But why me?"

"You are English. We trust you. You're brother with us."

I shook my head wildly.

The soldier clapped me on the shoulder.

"Be quiet, brother, be quiet ! We will protect you. No one can hurt you, Russia is free ! And we've elected you to go to Petrograd. You must go now. You're our squadron's choice. Is he, brothers?"

The last words were a stentorian shout over the parade-ground.

"Ay !" came back the answer, and seizing the rifle out of my hands the soldier began to wave it in the air and to lead a hoarse terribly ragged attempt to sing the Marseillaise, of which nobody knew the words and few seemed to be at all familiar with the tune. I looked round again at my fellow officers. Some looked frightened. Some were hanging their heads. All were standing where they were, afraid to move. Only K—— was showing any sign of interest, smiling at me and nodding his head. The soldier stopped waving the rifle and clapped his great hand on my shoulder again.

"You'll go, brother? Say you'll go !" he shouted in my ear.

I had been thinking desperately. Scenes like these were probably taking place by now everywhere there were troops. Russia was in revolt. If I refused to go, my own life might be spared, but there was no saying what might happen to the others, some of whom were my friends. If I went no harm could be done to anybody, except perhaps myself. Was this not the very problem we had been arguing about last night? The officers must join in if the revolution was to have leadership, if the army was to be prevented from degenerating into mutinous rabbles, if the war was to go on, if the new Russia was to be able to defend itself, if it was to go on fighting and win. There was simply no alternative that I could see. Russia was choosing and it was best that we should choose too.

I nodded and the soldier held up his hand.

"He'll go !" he shouted. "Our brother will go !"

The singing died down and was succeeded by a cheer.

"What happens here," I asked, when there was a lull in which I could speak, "while I am away ?"

"Nothing," he shouted back. "We shall wait for the order you will bring."

"And the officers—what about them ?"

"They will come to no harm if they do not interfere."

"You promise ?"

He held out his hand and grinned from ear to ear. I took it, rather squeamishly. The dead Colonel's chin still stuck stiffly in the air.

"All right, comrade !" shouted the soldier again. "The parade is dismissed !"

The soldiers crowded round me, shaking my hand, offering me cigarettes, and exhorting me to see that the Duma fellows were kept to their jobs. They seemed to have a strange belief in the existence of a wonderful machine which was capable of accomplishing everything if it were handled properly. The name of this machine was "The Revolution" and it was their machine. They had released it, given it the chance to function, and they were sending me to Petrograd to see that "The Revolution" was in no way outraged. As far as I could gather, the politicians would do all the work. My business was merely to see that "The Revolution" was not betrayed. Again and again the phrase was pushed at me out of a welter of eager hands and faces until I was touched by the confidence they were imposing on me. For centuries, I told myself, these people had been waiting for the touchstone, the magic talisman of freedom to fall into their hands. Now it had descended, bringing the Golden Age with it ; and like fearful children they were nervous lest their talisman should be snatched from them by clever schemers and

self-seekers or simply bungled away, and they had chosen me to represent them in ensuring that its virtues were well preserved. Before I got out of the midst of them I had shaken even the blood-stained hand of the Colonel's slayer with genuine feeling.

I made the journey to Petrograd in a motor-lorry full of delegates from the different regiments of the Tsarskoe Selo garrison. We left with cheers and cheered and were cheered all the way. The streets around the Tauride Palace where the Duma met were crowded with troops. We had been meeting lorries and cars of jubilating soldiers at every point of our passage through Petrograd itself and had learned from them that the garrisons at Pavlovsk and Oranienbaum had also come over. Not merely that, but a trainload of troops sent from the front to combat the revolution had joined the mutineers as soon as they had been detrained. Sailors from Kronstadt had joined in. The Fortress of Peter and Paul had been captured and all the prisoners liberated ; the Admiralty Buildings which had been held by loyal troops had been occupied ; and the District Court and the Secret Police headquarters in Gorokhovaya Street had also been seized and set on fire. Everybody was having a wonderful time.

Our lorry pushed its way to the wide street before the Duma building and halted of necessity on the edge, for it was choked with lorries, and we walked to the entrance through a *mêlée* of soldiers, sailors, peasants in holiday dress, and ordinary citizens. Everybody seemed to be there to see how the revolution was going on and every fresh arrival was greeted with cheers. A tall Guardsman of the Preobrashenski regiment announced that he would conduct us to the Military Commandant and we followed his lead. Inside the Palace there seemed almost as many soldiers as there were outside, lounging against the walls, talking in groups, smoking, spitting, obviously luxuriating in their new freedom, elbowing along the corridors like lords of the earth. I looked anxiously about me for signs of officers and actually saw a few, but they all seemed as dismayed and ill at ease as I felt myself.

At last we reached the room of the Military Commandant, Colonel Engelhardt, a member of the Duma, and found him surrounded by soldiers, all smoking furiously and plying him with questions. Our Guardsman guide introduced us with a flourish and Colonel Engelhardt bade us welcome, but he looked as if he were badly in need of some sleep, and when I found that the questions he was answering were wholly concerned with billeting dispositions, rations, and suchlike, and had nothing to do with us, I slipped out in a small attempt to relieve the pressure in the room. In the Catherine Hall I found a meeting being addressed by a civilian whom I did not know. It was a violent tirade he was making,

full of encomiums of the people and denunciations of the malefactors by whom they had been oppressed. I put him down at once as an indifferent wind-bag ; but the crowd in the hall was listening with open mouths, and a peasant beside me turned to me with as much pleasure as if he had been listening to Demosthenes himself, and said : "Isn't it wonderful ? He can say just exactly what he likes." For him, probably for all the crowd in the hall, the revolution was complete in these words.

I moved on and was standing outside a room in which bags of flour were being piled as if the Duma authorities were expecting to have to endure a siege, wondering what I should do next, when I saw someone coming towards me whom I knew. It was Sergeant Vlassieff, my old pupil of the Sanitas Club. I was delighted to find a friend in this muddle and he seemed almost as pleased to see me. He pushed me into an empty room and in answer to my questions told me that he was working for the Duma Committee, as was also Rak. The revolution was safe enough, he said—a counter-attack on any scale was impossible. All the railway men were solid for the revolution and had undertaken to prevent trains from the front getting through to Petrograd, while it was almost a certainty that the troops themselves would refuse to take any part in suppressing the rising. I complained that there seemed to be very little order in Petrograd, and his answer was that the Duma Committee was slowly getting control but that they were desperately short-handed as so few of the officers had come over.

He then suggested that I should offer my services to Colonel Gorlenko, who was organizing transport for the Committee and would be glad of the help of anybody who had some technical knowledge of cars and aeroplanes. I reminded him that I had been sent to Petrograd with a mission to represent my squadron, but he brushed my conscience on one side. What the revolution needed was workers, not bosses, he said ; and, inwardly relieved to escape so quickly from a position I was finding very uncongenial, I followed him to Colonel Gorlenko's office and was duly installed as assistant to the Assistant Minister of Transport in the Provisional Government which was established next day.

I soon discovered, however, that in the minds of almost all those who had brought it about, the revolution was much less a form of government to be established than a lovely new mood to be enjoyed. The main strength of the revolution was the factory workers of Petrograd and the soldiers of the garrisons ; and though they had nominally accepted the authority of the Duma Committee they were in no way disposed to surrender to it the licence to do as they pleased which their initial revolutionary action had now. The less



Alexander Kerensky, "the Napoleon in the frock coat of a Methodist preacher", who countermanded Mr. Blair's arrest of Trotsky and left the brilliant Bolshevik free to organize the seizure of Petrograd by the Soviets.

intelligent among them were intent only on celebrating their victory by endless joy-riding round the town in the motor-cars and cheering, smashing up things here and there, firing rifles and revolvers to intimidate all those whom they suspected of not being their friends, and bitterly resisting any attempt we in the Transport Ministry made to curb this pleasure, while the more purposeful among them were taking steps to keep the government in their own hands through the agency of a new Duma which they themselves had set up—the Petrograd Soviet of Working Men and Soldier Deputies.

This body had come into existence on the same evening as the Duma Committee, which had now become the Provisional Government, and was actually meeting in the same building side by side with the Duma itself. But its political complexion was considerably different, for its members were predominantly Social Revolutionaries with a number of Social Democrats, though these latter had not begun yet to carry much weight. Its inclination was much to the left of the Duma and it was determined to see that the new government should be kept as far as possible heading that way. There were, therefore, two governments in effect in Petrograd, and since the Soviet had the sympathy of the mobs, the Provisional Government could not do anything which the Soviet opposed. In fact, but for the decision of the young lawyer, Kerensky, who was then one of the most influential leaders of the Social Revolutionary party and Vice-President of the new Soviet, to support the Provisional Government, it could hardly have functioned at all.

The day after I took office, too, the Soviet published an order which had a very great influence on later events. This was the notorious Order No. 1, the main provisions of which ordered the elections of committees of the rank and file of all units of the army and navy who were to take charge of all arms and munitions, abolished saluting and all special forms of address for officers, and gave the committees power to arbitrate between officers and men, and instructed the forces to obey the orders of the Provisional Government only when these were not in contradiction to the orders of the Soviet.

The soldiers who had taken part in the revolution were determined that the officers whom they now distrusted because of their standing aloof from the first revolt would never have unlimited control over them again, and this was the method they had chosen to accomplish their end. The Provisional Government was, of course, powerless to countermand this order, and when the Government itself a day or two later undertook that the military units who had taken part in the revolution would not be transferred from Petrograd or disarmed, the supervisory power of the Soviet was

made supreme. The army mobs—for they were rapidly becoming little else—had all the licence they could ask for now, and the officers through their initial hesitation to join with them had lost caste for ever. All the generals at the front, ignorant of what was happening in the capital, had now declared in favour of the Provisional Government and the Tsar abdicated. The Duma had been in favour of a monarchy, first of the Tsarevitch and then of the Tsar's brother Michael ; but the Soviet won again, and a republic was declared.

All this had happened in the first week of my service under the Provisional Government, and with everyone else I had been tossed hither and thither like fish in a meeting of millstreams. Then one morning Colonel Gorlenko came to me with an order which the Soviet had not opposed. I was instructed to proceed to Tsarskoe Selo, requisition a lorry and whatever assistance I needed, and—exhume the body of Rasputin from its tomb in the Palace grounds, and take it to a laboratory in Petrograd where it would be chemically destroyed !

CHAPTER XI

THE BODY OF RASPUTIN

As I listened to Gorlenko my stomach turned to water and I felt myself go pale as if I had seen a ghost. The effect was visible. He stopped and asked me if I were ill. I was able to say it was the suggestion of exhuming a dead body which had given me a momentary spasm of sickness, and he went on to explain why the instruction had been issued.

Since Rasputin's burial the peasants of the neighbourhood had been paying visits to the grave, particularly women who were barren, because the rumour had gone around that the body of the former Khlysty rake still had the power to induce fertility in them. Several miracles of the kind were now declared to have come to pass, and there had recently been a number of demonstrations and scenes at the graveside. A local priest was encouraging them with a view to obtaining the reflected glory, and, to avoid any danger of a new Rasputin myth spreading, the Provisional Government had decided that the body should be destroyed. It is a Russian belief that the mark of a saint is the immunity of his dead body from corruption, and the Empress had done her best for Rasputin's saintly reputation by having his body carefully embalmed. But if the body were destroyed altogether by chemical means, Rasputin would die a second and final time. It struck me while Gorlenko talked that there was a suspicion of vindictiveness about this action of the Provisional Government, but I was too preoccupied with my own thoughts to remark on it, and Gorlenko left me with the hope that the job would be less distasteful than it at first sight appeared.

It was not the ghoulish task of grave-breaking and body-snatching which made me feel faint as I walked to the garage where we were keeping the few cars that were definitely in our hands, though that in itself was disagreeable enough. I was thoroughly convinced that the prophetic vision of the gipsy of the Villa Rode was about to become an actual fact, and I shrank with the deepest physical and mental disgust from the certainty which filled my mind. Before this job was finished I should have taken the cold, three months grave-bound corpse of Rasputin in my hands and washed it with water and warmed it before a fire. The vision was crazy, completely of

the stuff of which nightmares are made. I could think of no circumstances in earth or heaven which would lead me to perform this fantastic, impossible deed. But that I should be doing it before many hours had passed I was as certain as I was that some day I myself should die.

For three months almost, Rasputin had been lying safe in the tomb. What could have seemed safer, more done with, more eternally put away than a body lying in the tomb? And here, out of the blue, out of the middle of a period of which Russia itself was saying good-bye to Rasputin and all that Rasputin meant, without a shadow of warning had plopped down on me this utterly needless, useless commission; and the whole thing had come back to horrible life again.

There was no need to get bothered about it, I tried to tell myself. The body was in a coffin and all I had to do was to bring the unopened coffin to the chemists at the laboratory. It was they, not I, who would have to open it and perform the disgusting bit of the job. But it was no use. I couldn't be calmed. I knew deep in my bones that I was doomed, and before I was done with it something would happen which would lead me into circumstances in which every detail of the gipsy's incredible picture would have to come true.

Driving the car gave me back something of my grip on myself, however, and by the time I was out of Petrograd and on the country road to Tsarskoe Selo my mind had had time to summon up the customary suggestions of coincidence and distorted imagination and all the other aids with which we defend ourselves against the inexplicable. Things were quiet in Tsarskoe Selo. I went straight to the squadron station and asked of the first man I met who was now in command. He said all orders were being given by the squadron committee of which the soldier who had shot the Colonel was chairman. He came with three others, committee men all. They had appointed another representative to the Soviet and were quite pleased at my elevation to the executive ranks of the Provisional Government. They greeted me warmly and beamed with delight when I told them why I had come back.

"Just say what you want, brother, and it's yours. Russia is free!"

I asked for a lorry and half a dozen men with picks and crow-bars. There were no officers to be seen. At the entrance to the palace grounds we found a guard of machine-gunners set there to see that the Imperial family made no attempt to escape. The Tsar had been transferred from Pskoff (where the abdication had been signed) a day or two before. The soldiers bore no malice, apparently—not even to the Empress, and were even concerned because some of the Imperial children were dangerously ill.

There was a solitary peasant woman at the grave when we arrived—one of the childless supplicants, probably—but she scuttled away at our approach, and while the work of opening the tomb was going on no one came even in sight. I was astonished at the plainness of the coffin. It was an evidence of with how little ceremonial, and surreptitiously almost, the burial had been carried out. It was heavy and presumably lined with lead. The squadron committee had agreed to give me two men as an escort to Petrograd as well as the driver of the lorry and we set off, the soldiers with the coffin in the lorry, and I in front in the car. So far everything had proceeded satisfactorily and my spirits were brightening. Perhaps the job might be accomplished without untoward incident yet.

I had suggested taking a farm road not far from the grave which led round to the main road without the necessity of going through the town again, and we followed this until on rounding a corner by some barns I found the way blocked by a large crowd of peasants who filled the whole width of the road. I pulled up and at once they surrounded the car, shouting and gesticulating and brandishing spades and scythes in my face. Foremost among them was the woman whom we had scared away from the tomb, and I gathered they knew what we had been doing and had been on their way to stop us when we had run into them unawares.

The ringleaders were furious with rage and demanded that we should give back the coffin to them on the spot. I got out of the car and retired to the lorry. It was impossible to go on through the mob and the road was too narrow to permit the lorry to turn, but immediately behind it was an open gate into a small yard in front of one of the barns, and I ordered the driver to back in there and swing out again so that we could retire the way we had come. It meant abandoning the car, but I could not risk going back to it after the lorry had gone. The frustrated peasants would most likely have killed me without more ado.

But I had reckoned without the enemy in planning my manoeuvre. The lorry had backed into the yard all right, but before the driver had time to change gear and get the heavy vehicle moving in the soft mud the crowd of peasants had filled up the road in front of the gate and the way was barred. I hesitated to drive through them, for they would probably have stood their ground and some of them would have been killed or desperately hurt, and that moment's hesitation was my undoing; for it allowed half a dozen of them to push back the car to block the gateway and make us prisoners in the yard. I cursed my folly in not having driven straight on when we met them first.

I was in a fix. There was simply no way out with the coffin at

all. I could order the soldiers to shoot, but there were at least a hundred peasants outside and I believed we might have to shoot the major part of them before they gave way. They were well armed with serviceable farm implements and we were only four against the angry horde.

Pointing to two cans of petrol which were in the lorry, one of the soldiers suggested that we drench the coffin in petrol and set fire to it then and there. It was a crazy idea, of course. The peasants were likely to be a hundred times more incensed if we had the brazen sacrilegious effrontery to destroy the body in front of their eyes and we should certainly not escape with our lives. On the other hand, my instructions were to have the body of Rasputin destroyed. The Provisional Government would no doubt consider it far more important that its instructions should be carried out than that I and three soldiers should save our lives. Besides, something might turn up to get us out of the danger, and it was the business of soldiers to take risks with their lives. So I ordered two of the men to remain in the lorry under cover and fire over the heads of the mob if they made any attempt to break through or to climb over the wall, while the other man and I would drag the coffin from the lorry into the barn and try to destroy it with fire. Fortunately, the wall of the yard was high and it was easy enough for the men in the lorry to keep it under observation.

I have mentioned that the coffin was heavy. We began by dropping it on the ground. The soft mud broke the fall, but it must have rattled the poor body inside. We dragged the coffin through the mud, bumping and thumping over the ruts and through the puddles to the barn door. The place was empty and it had an earthen floor. It was also lofty for a Russian barn and wide, and if we did our burning in the middle, there seemed to me not too much risk of our setting the whole building afire. No sooner were we in position in the centre of the room than the soldier began prizing at the lid of the coffin with his bayonet. I asked him why.

"To open it, of course," he replied.

"But we don't need to open it," I protested.

"Even petrol will not burn lead," was the retort, and dumbly I watched him set to work again on the coffin-lid.

There had been no time since the meeting with the peasants to think of anything except the action in hand. All other apprehensions had been driven out of my mind. Even when the soldier had suggested burning the coffin and we had dropped it with that sickening clatter in the mud it had not occurred to me that there was anything looming up other than that I might have my head swept off with a peasant's scythe. I hadn't even thought how the coffin would

burn or what might happen to the body inside. But now that I was seeing the soldier's bayonet piercing under the lid, prising, splintering, with the object of raising it and revealing the contents of the coffin to our eyes, I knew I was going to be forced to look upon Rasputin's awful corpse and thereafter anything might happen in this world or between it and the next.

I was filled with cold terror when the bayonet finally perfected its work and the lid was pushed aside to fall on the floor and a white cerecloth was all that was between me and the thing I would almost have given my eyes not to see.

Unaffected by my torments, of which he was completely unaware, the soldier pushed the cerecloth back, and I saw Rasputin dressed in exactly the same clothes as he had worn all the days of his Petrograd life—blue silk blouse, black velvet trousers, and high boots. His hands were crossed on his breast. The embalmers had done their work well, for his complexion, naturally sallow, was scarcely paler than I had known it in life, and apart from a discoloration on the neck where the blouse ended, marking the spot where the bullet entered with which he had been killed, there was no sign or hint of decay. Out of the coffin there came actually a fragrant, herbal smell. Most blessed of all, the eyes were closed. I could see the two small stitches with which the cunning embalmers had held the lids together.

The soldier woke me from a reverie.

"I'll get the petrol," he said.

"No, no, I will !" I cried, and dashed out of the door-way. I couldn't have borne to be left with the corpse alone.

Outside the gate the peasant crowd was arguing among themselves, evidently holding a council of war, but as yet, the soldiers reported, there had been no attempt to pass the barricade which the peasants themselves had made. I seized the tins of petrol and hurried back.

The soldier had pulled the body from the coffin, and it lay stiff as a poker on its face on the ground. He seemed to take it for granted that he should do the work, so I handed him one of the tins and he liberally soaked the shirt and trousers with the liquid, then stood well back and threw a match deftly on to the centre of the back. There was a slight explosion as the fumes caught fire and flames flickered over the blue silk, leaped high, and in a second the whole body seemed ablaze. It burned fiercely for some minutes. I was glad the face was not visible. I imagined the flames severing the surgical threads and dramatically opening the eyes. I was glad to see the flames. I was sure this would be the end, and the relief I had experienced on finding the body itself so much less terrible than I had

anticipated began to enlarge as I believed I could see all my terrors melting as easily away. But to my surprise the flames gently died down after a short hectic time. They flickered for a moment around the stiff, naked body which they had stripped of its protective coverings, whisked away the beard and the hair, flickered again as though wishful to make another attempt, and gave up altogether. The soldier and I stared at each other in blank dismay.

All we had succeeded in doing was to divest death of the garments which gave it dignity and leave a body, ludicrously pathetic in its hairless nakedness, rump uppermost, stiff-legged, and with another large discoloured wound-mark in the middle of the back. It was a shocking sight and all my horror returned to see that the flames had been powerless to do more than this indecent japing harm. But the soldier was my rock again. This man was utterly devoid of superstition and nerves. A blunt materialistic realism supported him triumphantly at every step. He was a mechanic to whom all things were aspects of the machine.

“It’s the stuff they’ve soaked him in to hold off the rot,” he declared.

“But what can we do? If it won’t burn . . .”

My imagination balked at going farther. But the soldier was a man of resource as well as nerve.

“We’ll make a fire, soak him in petrol, and lay him on it. That should do him in.”

There was no stopping now. Part of the barn was lined inside with boards, and with his bayonet to help him he began tearing these down. I lent a hand, but he was master of the situation and I was his slave.

“You soak the corpse,” he said. I turned dutifully from him and picked up the tin, hearing the liquid lap its sides. In that instant I saw that the gipsy’s pictured scene was about to realize itself in the strangest possible way. I was about to wash Rasputin’s dead body exactly as she had foreseen. It was not her fault that she had mistaken petrol for water. Well, if this was my fate it was odd, but it was bliss to the service my inflamed imagination had built out of her words. I unscrewed the cap of the tin, and conquering my repugnance to approaching the lewd-looking corpse, I splashed it liberally with the petrol and felt clean and light inside me like a sleeper whose hurricane nightmare has suddenly slipped into a mad but soothingly friendly backwater of a dream. Soaking a corpse in petrol preparatory to burning it was simple and intelligible work compared with the crazy corpse-washing I had imagined myself being compelled to perform.

“Leave a drop of that petrol for me,” commanded the soldier,

who was building his fire some yards away from the body, and once more obediently I crossed to him and handed him the remainder of the tin. He poured it on the wood and applied a match. It flared up high and leaped and crackled. This was the fire at which the gipsy had seen me warming Rasputin's corpse. The prophecy was complete.

While we were watching the fire to see how well the wood was to burn, two shots rang out outside and there was a new louder roar from the peasants and some screams from the women with them. Something was happening out there so we had no time to waste. Now that I knew how matter-of-fact was the explanation of what the gipsy had seen, and that there was no psychic spell being put upon me, no magic compulsion to have me doing hideous things that would leave me unclean and crazed for the rest of my life, I was ready to drive with energy at the very same actions which a moment before I had been approaching leaden-footed and with agony in my mind. Simultaneously on hearing the shots, the soldier and I both dashed at the petrol-smelling corpse and began to drag it to the fire.

I have mentioned that the body was now stark naked, with the hair and beard singed off, and lying buttocks upwards on the earthen floor. Naturally, it was stiff and rigid as a pole, and when we each seized an ankle, yanking the legs in the air in our hurry, and pulled, we dragged the nose in a furrow along the ground. This would have been nothing, but it caused the jaw to open, and when a bump on the floor turned the head round sideways it looked for a second as if the corpse had opened its mouth to roar at us for treating it so. In spite of my new-found confidence I almost dropped the leg I held in sudden fright. Touching the dead skin had not been so repugnant as I should have thought. It had all the feel as well as the appearance of cold wax. But I let go of it as quickly as possible and positively tossed it from me when the body touched the fire. The corpse had been lighter to lift than I had expected—owing, I suppose, to the removal of all the internal organs when it was being embalmed. But we had dropped it clumsily, leaving the right side of the chest and belly in the flames, so the soldier gave it a push with his boot and rolled it over, exposing the chest and arms, and in the motion of turning over the jaw flapped shut and open again as if it were giving out another soundless cry of pain.

I was feeling no compunction about how we were treating the corpse, rather a sadistic pleasure in each indignity we were heaping on the poor defenceless thing, partly as compensation for the terror the thought of it had originally roused in me ; partly, I think, because the unresisting ugliness of its very corpsishness was infuriating us. We were alive and it was so utterly dead and helpless in our hands

that we need not have respect even for death any more. This was not death, any more than an Egyptian mummy is death. It was just a stiff, frozen corpse, grotesque, horrid, and comic, and I believe we were being coarse and brutal in our handling of it because we were shocked at finding death behaving like a naked clown and took out our annoyance and disappointment on the body itself in consequence.

But it was less helpless in our hands and more perversely clownish than it had any right to be. Whether owing to the heavy impregnation of the flesh with the embalming materials which had been used, or to the fact that the petrol I had so liberally poured over the body had run off the wax-like surface of the skin without affecting it, or a combination of both these possibilities, it was very evident that Rasputin's corpse was refusing to be destroyed by fire. The flesh would not even begin to brown or char. Nothing was happening at all, despite the way the flames were leaping and licking around it, except that a reddish-brown substance with which the throat and the passages connecting it with the nose and ears had been filled was melting in the heat and causing a thick fluid like half-congealed blood to ooze from the mouth, nose, and ears. It was impossible to look at the dirty brown flow without feeling faint.

This sight and the corpse's defiance of the flames punctured my sadistic joy completely, and without a doubt I should have slunk out of the place and run away, telling the Provisional Government of Russia to destroy its dangerous dead itself, if the steadily rising storm of voices outside, punctuated by another couple of shots, had not reminded us that we were prisoners with our dreadful work and if we were caught with this bungled evidence by our side stood a fair chance of being burned on the fire by the rude justice of the peasants in its place. Cursing loudly, the soldier tore down more wood from the wall and threw it on the fire, heaping it over the corpse until it was lost to sight in a flaming Gehenna of crackling timber. But when the flames had burned themselves out and the ashes and charred sticks had dropped to the bed of the fire, leaving the centre exposed, we saw that the body of Rasputin was as whole and undestroyed as ever.

I suppose we were fools ever to believe that we could destroy a body in an open fire that way, but there was no doubt now that we had failed miserably, and this incredibly embarrassing and shaming brown-stained white body, looking more naked, more human, more pitiful than ever, was silently accusing us of the feeble futility of our pains. I have never felt so humiliated before or since as in the presence of that mute unsuffering relic of a man I had known, and but for the presence of the soldier I should have gone down on my knees and begged forgiveness of it for what we had done. I think the

soldier was feeling something of the same, or perhaps he was just abashed at the failure of his scheme. Anyhow, he had no more suggestions to offer and stared as wretchedly at his handiwork as I.

There was nothing we could do but restore the outraged thing to the shelter from which it had been torn, and with some show of reverence this time we lifted the stark carcase off the smouldering ruins of the fire and stowed it with some difficulty in the coffin again. The soldier was invaluable. At last it was done, and the broken pieces of lid covered the misery over. I swore to myself that nothing would ever induce me to look beneath them again.

The soldier now turned to me for orders. I stepped to the door of the barn to see what the situation was outside. I was feeling like a washed-out rag after all the emotional excitement I had gone through and no more capable of dealing with the peasant mob waiting for us outside the gate than a man suffering from concussion after a toss would be of handling a drove of wild bulls. I was, in fact, so stupefied that I had stared for a few seconds at the top of a covered lorry projecting over the top of the wall along the lane before I realized that it was a lorry and a new one, not ours, which was still in the same position barring the entrance through the gate. In the crisis of discovering that Rasputin's body would not burn we had not heard its arrival. I could hear many voices beyond the wall, but they were calm and ordered by comparison with the furious shouting that had been going on when last I was aware of anything outside the barn. My two men were no longer in their lorry. Evidently something had happened of which we had been too intent on our beastly work to take notice.

I went forward to the gate, climbed into our lorry, and found a dozen men of the machine-gun company, which had been guarding the entrance to the palace, shepherding the peasants at the point of their bayonets down the road. Hearing the shots, they had come to investigate, and my men had induced them to come to our aid. It was as though fate had permitted them to arrive only when the sorry play of the gipsy's prophecy was safely over and Rasputin's poor dead body had been both uselessly washed and warmed.

They escorted us and our burden to the main road, and in due course that evening I handed over the broken coffin to the charge of a white-coated chief chemist at the laboratory, who smilingly asked me if I cared to attend the last rites. In the tedious brief tragical mirth of "Rasputin Dead" he spoke the last gag.

PART TWO
THE CELL OF LICE

CHAPTER I

NAPOLEON IN A FROCK-COAT

IN the first fortnight of the revolution the soldiers who had made it symbolized the existence of the new era which they had so enthusiastically inaugurated by joy-riding on motor-lorries, marching with banners through the streets, listening with great concentration to the hundreds of orators who were burning to address them, and lolling up against the walls in all public and private places, smoking endless cigarettes and expectorating continuously and expressively to show how free and fine and manly they had become. In the next two or three weeks the passion for demonstrating died down and the lorries were surrendered, more or less willingly, to Provisional Government control. The revolution had appointed its leaders and the revolutionary soldiers were prepared to grant them an opportunity to show what they could do, with the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies holding a very lively watching brief.

But though they were willing to surrender the lorries after they had tired of them, the soldiers showed no desire whatever to surrender themselves. For years they had been told that all Russia required was a revolution. Well, they had produced the revolution and it was now up to those who had cried for the revolution to get on with it. For their part, they were perfectly happy to watch the others do it, to see the miracles come out of the hat. Lolling against walls was even too active an attitude now. They sat or lay about in their hundreds waiting for the millennium to appear.

Unfortunately, among the leaders they had appointed, there were no good conjurers and far too many hats. Moreover, they were all on the stage at once, all extolling the merits of the rabbits they would like to produce but nobody taking steps to bring anything forth. The strange thing was that the audience did not seem to care a hoot. It wasn't the rabbits they wanted but the talk. I have already mentioned how I listened to an orator in the Catherine Hall of the Tauride Palace on the occasion of my first visit to the Duma after the revolution and overheard a listening peasant remark with wonder on the fact that the orator was able to say anything he wished. He was speaking for the whole of Petrograd

when he voiced that thought, for Moscow, for all Russia where there was anybody competent to talk.

For a people who for centuries had been forced to curb their thoughts under penalty of the whip, the bullet, prison or Siberia, this new-found freedom of speech was miracle enough. With a truly Russian passion for the enjoyment of the novel, they were sitting down now to indulge it to the full. There was so much to hear, so much to say. Why should they do anything else but listen while there was anyone left to speak? Here was the lotus and gone were the powers to say them nay. Then eat and eat!

Yet it was not all simple lotus-eating in this spate of public speech-making into which revolutionary Russia had plunged. Among thousands of the listeners there was a genuine desire to taste and know. For building new worlds there were so many architects, so many plans. How was it possible to commit oneself to this scheme, however marvellous and convincing it might sound, when round the corner there was still someone who had not been heard and who, for all one knew, might be offering to bring out of his hat a rabbit that had five legs as well as a pink tail? The revolutionary population of Petrograd was like a village crowd at a fair insisting on hearing what every barker had to say before it made up its mind to spend its money. That is presuming, of course, that the majority of them realized that they were really free to decide how they were to spend their own money, for however much they might talk about freedom and the responsibilities of the people, the truth remained that no miracle had happened in the accomplishment of their revolution to make the Russians either responsible to themselves or politically free. Without the imposition of a will from above they were in truth sheep without a shepherd and, as yet, it looked as though no one among them was to have the will or the courage to get on his hind legs and assume the shepherd's role.

So they talked and listened, and ran from this bleating gathering to that baaing crowd, thoroughly delighted with their sheep's paradise because they could make as much noise as they liked without interference from the dog. It was exasperating to those like myself who were not so avid of talk and were eager to be doing something, but it was understandable as a stage through which the revolution had to pass. Freedom of speech was a new toy to them and they had to be allowed to wear it out.

Meanwhile, the members of the Provisional Government and their supporters were tearing their nerves to tatters between frantic conferences by day to decide what should be done and blustering performances on the conjurers' platforms in the evening telling

the people how splendid it would all be when they had done it, and how glad they should be to have men like themselves who could talk so well about when they were going to do it. The majority of them were completely incompetent, of course, from sheer lack of experience of political control. There was simply no tradition to guide them, no machinery even which they could employ. The old bureaucracy was anathema to everybody and was a wolf in the midst of the sheep waiting a chance to snap.

The Government, too, was a coalition without a goal. The parties were mistrustful of one another and without confidence in themselves. Like the soldiers and the people, they had accomplished their only aim when they had got rid of the Tsar and with the wind of their opposition to the absolute monarchy out of their sails they were ships becalmed. The only point they were at all united on was their will to go ahead with the war. But when they at last got down to thinking what they should do about this they discovered the big mistake they had made in allowing the sheep to abolish the dogs. They still had an army, the biggest in the field. It was better equipped than it had been at any time in the past three years. Efficiently led, the Russian forces were in a position to put their full weight into the struggle at last. But there was the rub. The army was without leaders, sheep without shepherd or dogs. The Provisional Government's power to continue the war had been ham-strung by Order No. 1.

Order No. 1 was a charter to the troops absolving them from the necessity of obeying any orders which they had not previously discussed among themselves and approved, and as such was completely incompatible with the waging of a war. The Russian army was paralysed, robbed at one stroke of the power of brain over limb, of the co-operation of limb with limb, of the ability to move an inch in concert without a referendum of seven million men. Through their class-conscious hesitations over joining in a revolution initiated from below, the Russian officer class had thrown away their right to leadership of the army in revolt and made the inspiration of the rank and file committee system of Order No. 1 inevitable. Class distrust, class hatred, class warfare had been born, but it had been engendered, so far as the army was concerned, from above.

If the right of free speech was a lovely new toy to the people in general, the committee rule set up by Order No. 1 was at first an equally lovely plaything of their own to the soldiers in the garrisons and at the front. They deposed and elected officers with the enthusiasm and fickleness of girls choosing leaders for their games at school. One of the Petrograd battalions chose three commanding officers in one day.

Drill had been entirely abolished. In most of the barracks the main occupation of the day, both for officers and men, was playing cards. Grandly rhetorical messages of mutual congratulation on the success of the revolution passed daily from battalion to battalion, from the factories and workshops to the battalions and back again. Similar things were happening at the front. Deputations from Petrograd visited the front to harangue the troops ; return deputations from the front went to Petrograd to harangue the garrisons and be harangued by the politicians. Politics and elections were the great enthusiasm everywhere because they were new.

Fighting had ceased entirely and fraternization between the forces in the opposing front lines was being encouraged by the Germans. The Russian soldier had suddenly lost interest in the war. He was obsessed with the vaguely wonderful possibilities of a new world which he felt sure the revolution was somewhere and somehow calling into being, and there was nothing new for him in cowering in a trench under an artillery barrage. The war belonged to the old world and he wanted to live to taste the good things of the new. So while his brothers in Petrograd played cards in the barracks or went to meetings (a completely new word had been coined to describe this fascinating new occupation, the language never having required one before), the soldier at the front also played cards and went to meetings, rather envious of his brother, who was so close to where all the grand things were going to happen, but for the most part, in the early months at least, too pleased with the freedom of laziness to have the initiative even to desert. They were really in two minds about the war. Some were for peace at once ; others were willing to finish the war, but only if it were finished very quickly.

Actually all of them were at the mercy of every orator who came to speak to them. While one politician was exhorting them to continue the war and help their German brothers to throw off the yoke of Kaiserdom they were full of warlike sentiments and, had an offensive been ordered at that moment, would probably have obeyed with eagerness and have gone on fighting so long as victory was theirs. Unfortunately, orators could not be speaking with equal vigour in all parts of the line at the same time, so the enthusiasm for war was never general and never prolonged. It invariably petered out as soon as the perspiring orator had gone away. It was impossible, therefore, for the Provisional Government or the generals whom it had placed in command of the various fronts to order any movements of the troops because they had no reason to believe that their orders would have been obeyed.

On the whole the Government leaders were confident that the

people would soon settle down and that the army would be won back to reason again if we could only get rid of the German agents who were at work sapping the belief of the country in the need for victory, and Counter-Espionage, to which I still belonged, was soon busy with this task. But the job was a hundred times more difficult now than it had been when every German spy had only a dozen allies in the service of the Tsar. Now thousands of Russians were speaking the language the spies spoke themselves.

In a situation where all the "isms" that had ever been known, and many others of purely spontaneous origin, were being sedulously canvassed and discussed, it was not surprising that there should be some who were anxious to put forward the claims of Marxism to be the rabbit which should be brought out of the hat. What did astonish me was to find that Marxism in greater or less degree was the political faith which animated the majority of those supporters of the revolution of whom the Provisional Government was most afraid and whom it was most anxious to placate.

There was no doubt about it, Marxism had made a way for itself among the workers of Petrograd which was now being felt. They had suddenly emerged as a power in the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Not at first the Bolsheviks. They were a small body. But the Mensheviks, the Oborontsi, and the Edintsvo Party, who were all sections of the Social Democrats, differing from one another in detail, but all at one in their acceptance of the social philosophy of Karl Marx. It was their tongue that was speaking through the Soviet in the proclamations it was issuing from time to time calling on the workers of Germany and Austria to make common cause with Russia by throwing over their own Imperialisms and ending the war in an international proletarian alliance. It was their will which had imposed itself on the Soviet and was now permeating all Russia with the demand for peace without vengeance, "Peace without annexations or contributions", peace without the spoils of victory for either side, and the policy of self-determination for all subject peoples.

Here was a rabbit which had come a long way out of the hat and had just the right birthmarks of idealism, international friendship, and a clean breakaway from the old order of things to make an appeal to the present mood of the Russian people. Notwithstanding this policy, however, when they received no response from the peoples of Germany and Austria to their plea for co-operation, and the Provisional Government at last decided in May to pull the army together and renew the war, the main body of the Social Democrats in the Soviet decided to support the Provisional Government and issued an appeal to the troops to cease parleying

with the enemy. Encouraged by their support, Kerensky, whom everybody regarded as the one man who was capable of infusing a new spirit into the troops, had taken over the post of Minister of War.

But the small body of Bolsheviks were a different kettle of fish. Also Social Democrats, there was no compromising with Allied Imperialism for them. The abolition of the autocracy was only the mere first step for them. Of all the parties supporting the revolution, their rabbit was the fullest grown, inedible as it was to most. It was out-and-out Socialism, the complete wiping out of the capitalist system from Russia, and the substitution for it of Karl Marx, undiluted and undelayed. As avowed bitter opponents of the Provisional Government, whom they denounced as "lackeys of Capitalism", the Bolsheviks were a menace to the Allied cause. But there was another, more sinister reason for their engaging the attention of the Counter-Espionage.

When Lenin, Kameneff, Radek, Lunatcharsky and Krylenko arrived in Petrograd a month after the revolution began, they had travelled from Switzerland through Germany in a sealed carriage provided for them at the request of the Swiss Social Democratic Party by the German Government. The Germans had only one reason for providing this facility. They saw in Lenin and his policies a possible means of harrying the Provisional Government and helping to keep Russia out of the remainder of the war. The Bolsheviks were not pro-Germans. But Lenin saw in the situation that had arisen in Russia the opportunity of turning the revolution into a victory for his aims if only the Provisional Government could be kept from establishing a stable regime. So he set to work the moment he arrived to foment agitation against it, advocating the withdrawal of Russia from this capitalist and imperialist war and the duty of fraternization with the enemy. His aim was also to provoke the German soldiers to revolt against their capitalist and imperialist government, but that was subsidiary to his main purpose of turning the Russian revolution into a victory for Marxism at all costs.

This was cutting right across the existing lines, even the wobbling lines of the Provisional Government and the other sections of the Soviet. It frightened the other wings of the Social Democrats. It threatened the life of the Provisional Government and all the vague Liberal ideas it imagined itself to be standing for. It aimed a dangerous blow at the hopes of an Allied victory coming soon. From our point of view it was playing right into German hands. Therefore Lenin and his associates had to be fought with all the determination Counter-Espionage could muster in this hesitant, terribly indeterminate time.

It was not a question of proving a case. The Bolsheviks were working in the open. Lenin's headquarters were in the former residence of the dancer, Kshesinskaya, who had been the mistress of the late Tsar before he married. It was opposite the British Embassy on the other side of the bridge across the Neva, and every day Lenin and his colleagues addressed the crowds which assembled there on his party's aims. The incitement to rise against the Provisional Government was forthright and absolutely undisguised. *Pravda*, the Bolshevik newspaper, daily denounced the objects for which the war was being fought and lost no opportunity of vilifying all the governments associated with it. The one clear, unfailing, unequivocal voice to be heard in Petrograd was the voice of the Bolshevik Party with its strident call for the overthrow of Capitalism.

But the Government would not move a finger against this enemy in its midst. In the first place it was forbidden by the grand revolutionary boon of free speech. This was a sacred principle with all the members of the Government, the corner-stone of the revolution, and was not to be interfered with, however great the danger to themselves. Secondly, the Bolsheviks had a host of sympathizers with their anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist propaganda even among those who were strongly opposed to their anti-war stand. All the other Social Democrats stood with them in the ultimate objects of their agitation; many of the Social Revolutionaries, including Kerensky himself, showed their anti-capitalist sentiments while being less outspoken in their denunciations and whole-hearted in their views.

There was only one line on which the Bolsheviks could be attacked and that was the manifest assistance they were giving to the Germans. If it could be proved that they were not working for Russia at all, nor for any of the ideals of social justice which they claimed, but plainly and simply for the success of Germany in the war, there was still a chance of discrediting them in the eyes of the soldiers and the people and stopping the propaganda for peace, and it was to this end that the activities of Counter-Espionage were now directed.

The proofs were not difficult to obtain. Germany had helped Lenin and some of his leading colleagues to return to Russia, of course. That was point one. Point two was the colossal funds which the Bolsheviks seemed to have at their disposal. The Social Democratic Party had never been wealthy. Obviously it would not be encouraged by rich men. But simple observation produced the fact that from Lenin himself downwards the Bolsheviks had money enough for every purpose and to spare. *Pravda* was appearing every day and being given away free in hundreds in Petrograd and

at the front. The money for this was not being found in Russia, therefore it must be coming from Germany. The sources were easily tracked down to two well-known agents, a man named Fuerstenberg, alias Ganetzky, in Stockholm, and another, Parvus, alias Hellfand, in Copenhagen. Both of these were regularly transmitting money to Lenin, also suggestions for the propaganda which should be carried on, even to details of the slogans which should be emblazoned on banners displayed at meetings and in street parades.

There was another proof to hand. A Russian officer named Ermolenko was captured by the Germans. It so happened that one of the leaders of the movement for the separation of the Ukraine from Russia had the same name, and believing that he was the officer who had fallen into their hands they made him the suggestion that he should return to Russia and carry on his separatist propaganda. The officer accepted the offer and was given instructions to work with Lenin and told that he would receive funds from the same source as the Bolsheviki, the spy paymaster in Sweden. On his return to the Russian lines the officer reported this to the military authorities. More than that, telegrams from Fuerstenberg and Parvus addressed to Lenin's wife and others had been intercepted by the Post Office.

The case was clear, but still nothing was done. The proofs established by the Counter-Espionage were deposited with the Ministry of Justice, but since the benefit of the money supplied by Germany had extended beyond the Bolshevik Party and even assisted the propaganda of the Soviet, the Government was scared of making any use of it. The evidence languished in the archives and the Bolsheviki pursued their German-subsidized propaganda undeterred. Lenin himself made no bones about the source of his funds when taxed with taking money from Germany. "Of course I take money from Germany," he said. "I would take money from the devil himself."

In partial answer to the complaints, however, *Pravda* announced that the Bolsheviki were not seeking a separate peace for Russia but a general peace in which the workers of all the warring countries would share. But this pronouncement had its barb. Peace would mean the immediate demobilization of the seven million soldiers who would flock back to their homes in undisciplined bands and a consequent crop of disruptions which the Bolsheviki were ready to reap. At every turn they had the advantage, unique in Russia at that time, of knowing their own minds.

It was all a question now of how soon the Bolsheviki would attempt to seize the power in the land and whether Kerensky would be able to race them to it with the drive for victory which he

had planned. A new offensive by the Russian army was to begin early in July. If it were successful, it was conceivable that the morale of the army would be restored. With victory in arms to crown their revolution, the Russian people could again be made whole, the Government consolidated (in what form nobody knew), and the danger of a Bolshevik coup removed. Kerensky, as Minister of War, was valiantly trying with all the propaganda methods in his power to infuse the troops with enthusiasm for the new effort and to effect some sort of a compromise between the discipline which the generals were impressing on him as essential for success and the democratic self-rule which had prevailed everywhere in the army for the past three months.

Unfortunately, drafts which were being entrained for the front were deserting wholesale and arriving at the trenches hundreds short, in spite of an edict of the Minister of War that all deserters who had not returned to the forces by a certain date would be severely punished. Troops which were despatched to the German front were forcing the railway authorities to carry them to the Austrian front instead, because the enemy were so much weaker there. The Russian soldier was interpreting peace as peace for his own skin.

On the Bolshevik front things were moving, too. Counter-Espionage, still doing all it could, reported that the Bolsheviks were busy in the machine-gun regiments stationed in Petrograd in which machine-gunners were trained for service at the front. One of the units was already notoriously unruly and the Bolsheviks were making headway in the others. If the Bolsheviks got control of the machine-guns they could have everything their own way. Again no action was taken against the Bolsheviks themselves, but General Polovtzeff, commanding the Petrograd district, moved quickly and sent a large number of the machine-guns stored in Petrograd to the front. He also reduced the munition supplies available in the city.

On July 1 Kerensky's offensive began. On the eve of it Kerensky paid a flying visit to the front to fortify the soldiers with his own last-minute eloquence. He was not uniformly successful. The majority of the troops whom he addressed responded with cheers, but there was a considerable minority who held aloof from his meetings and called him a *bourgeois*, the most contemptible epithet in their vocabulary since reading or having read to them the scornful use of it in *Pravda's* vitriolic sheets. A growling undertone of "Down with the war!" accompanied the cheers in the infantry regiments in a proportion of roughly four to six. The "Ayes" had it, but not by much. The cavalry and artillery were soundly in favour

of the move, and special storm companies had been created to infuse the less reliable infantry with the fervour of their example, men pledged to obey the orders of their officers and eschew politics and shelve the new democratic machinery with which they were so enamoured until the offensive would be over and the object gained. Picked men from the old guard of the revolutionaries whose allegiance to the new regime could not be questioned were posted to special points along the front from which they could exhort the waverers and dispel any tendency which might appear among the attackers to submit their orders to the test of parliamentary debate before deciding whether or not to carry them out.

In this way attempts were made to overcome the evil effect from a military point of view of the "go to meeting" habit which had become the chief characteristic of the democratic army, although it was still as the world's only democratic army that Kerensky was appealing to them to show the world what they could do.

The last step in the effort to convert the army of democracy into a fighting machine was the circulation, as a safeguard against Demos turning beast, of a rumour that the enemy were baiting their trenches with poisoned wines and spirits in the expectation that the victorious Russian troops would succumb to the temptations of looted liquor. And with this signal tribute to their moral stature ringing in their ears, the soldiers of the new Russia went to their first baptism of fire.

The artillery had done its work well and the first troops over the top encountered almost no resistance at all. But nowhere was the advantage pressed with any vigour. Whole regiments refused to advance and left those who did in danger of being cut off. Thousands of soldiers hid in the woods until the fighting was over, and others retired with minor wounds inflicted by themselves. After three or four days of half-hearted fighting it was obvious that the offensive had failed.

Ten days later the Bolsheviks attacked. There was no surprise about the onslaught. On Sunday, July 15, the First Depot Machine Gun Regiment, under the leadership of a Bolshevik ensign named Semashko, held a meeting addressed by Trotsky and Lunatcharsky at which they were openly incited to demonstrate against the injustice of the Provisional Government in disbanding a regiment of the guards for refusing to take part in the fighting at the front which was still haphazardly going on. The executive of the Bolsheviks deliberated all through the same night at Kshesinkaya's house. Next day prominent Bolsheviks visited all the units of the army in Petrograd and pressed them to take part in the demonstration, but our Counter-Espionage men had been at work in anticipation



Leon Trotsky, who was arrested by Mr. Blair in July 1917, and who later raced to Petrograd in a special train and saved it from the plot organized by Mr. Blair and his friends to immobilize the city's defences and leave it at the mercy of General Yudenitch's advancing White army.

of this move and the agitators met with no success except in one Guards regiment which was notoriously pro-Bolshevik. In the face of the hesitation of the Government to act there was nothing more we or the local command could do except to wait for the Bolsheviks to make the first move.

It came late on the Monday evening. Led by Semashko, the machine-gunners and the Guards began to march through the city. They were joined almost immediately by crowds of workmen from the factories, most of them armed, who had been waiting in readiness, and as the march proceeded men from other regiments joined in. Soon they were at least ten thousand strong. Loyal soldiers were sent to guard the Duma, but, rather ironically, it was chiefly Bolsheviks who were assembled there passing a resolution calling upon the Soviet to assume the supreme power. The Government was afraid to call out any troops to deal with the demonstrators in case they should refuse, and the attitude of the authorities seemed to be that if the workers and soldiers of Petrograd wished to go Bolshevik it was idle to attempt to stop them. This situation continued on the following day with the addition that some thousands of wild-looking sailors from Kronstadt arrived demanding an immediate end to the war. Most of the population were staying indoors because bands of machine-gunners were riding about in lorries which they had commandeered, pointing their guns at the windows and threatening to shoot anyone who appeared on the streets.

I had contacted Rak and Vlassieff on the previous evening and we had all three gone to Rak's room at the General Staff offices to be in readiness for any counter-action which might be ordered. There were several squadrons of Cossacks in the city, and as the day wore on officials of the War Ministry began to take courage and suggest that an attempt might be made with the Cossacks to get the demonstrators under control. The mob in the streets were far from being an impressive crowd and their numbers were not increasing. As far as could be ascertained, most of the garrison units were maintaining a disinterested neutrality. If some means could be found of turning them definitely in favour of the Provisional Government or even to immunize them only from further infections of the Bolshevik fever, the Cossacks could almost certainly prove a match for the mutineers. It was while this problem was being discussed that Rak suddenly had an idea.

"The German funds !" he shouted. "Why don't we show Parvus's telegrams to the troops ?"

There seemed a possibility in the suggestion. If we could convince the garrisons that Lenin and his friends were merely German agents

fomenting insurrections to open Russia to a German invasion, the scale might be turned. The idea was hurriedly canvassed among officials of the District Staff and met with their immediate approval. It so happened that Pereverseff, the Socialist Public Prosecutor in whose keeping were the proofs collected by the Counter-Espionage, was in the building along with other members of the Government, and Rak rushed off to acquaint him with the plan. Pereverseff was strongly anti-Bolshevik and approved at once, sending to the Ministry of Justice for the dossier. While the messenger was on his way, my political chief in the Ministry of Transport, Nekrasoff, who was among the ministers present, heard of what was proposed and denounced the scheme violently. A regular battle ensued, but Pereverseff stood his ground and when the papers arrived handed them over to a member of the Social Democratic Party named Gregory Alexinsky. This was a brilliant stroke. Years before, Alexinsky had been the leader of the Bolsheviks, before Lenin. He was now a Menshevik, but he was looked on as one of the fathers of the revolution and was immensely respected in and out of Petrograd.

A crowd of soldiers had collected in the street outside the General Staff windows and, immediately he learned what the papers contained, Alexinsky threw open a window and began to read the damning information out to them. These ran and collected others, and Alexinsky read the indictment once again. In a few minutes the street was swarming with soldiers discussing the scandal and angrily denouncing the Bolshevik leaders as German spies. As soon as he saw how the news was being received, Rak sent Vlassieff and myself hot-foot to the streets to collect soldiers who had heard Alexinsky and take them with us to other barracks to spread the information. At the same time Pereverseff rushed off to communicate the facts to one of the newspapers which came out with a full account of Lenin's German dealings later in the day. Long before midnight the Bolsheviks had been completely discredited even among many of their own regular followers. The Cossacks were brought out, and with the exception of the fortress of Peter and Paul and Kshesinskaya's house, the capital was soon again under Provisional Government control. Next day both these places were occupied and the troops supporting the Bolsheviks all surrendered. The revolt, under threat of which the Provisional Government had lived precariously for weeks, was over. The Bolsheviks had shot their bolt and failed.

We lived under an inverted pendulum in these days. So far, all the tendency had been for the hammer-blow to descend on us who supported the Provisional Government. Now, almost by a

miracle, it had swung the other way and descended on the Bolsheviks. Not only were they in rout, but ninety per cent of the public opinion of the city and garrisons was in full cry after them, demanding their blood. All sections of the populace were clambering on to the ball of the fallen pendulum, eager to add their weight to crush the stricken Bolsheviks beyond all possibility of recovery again. We were elated in the Counter-Espionage. The exposure of the Bolsheviks as takers of German money had succeeded in arousing much stronger passions than we had hoped. We had given the Government an opportunity it had never expected to possess, and we strained like dogs on the leash with our teeth bared for Bolshevik throats.

The first personal thrill was mine.

"You will find Trotsky, Zinovieff, Tchicherin, and other Bolshevik leaders in a house in Viborgskaya. Soldiers and Cossacks are waiting downstairs. Go with them and arrest all the Bolsheviks you can find. Here is the order." It was signed by Pereverseff.

We piled into our motor-lorries and set off. We met with no resistance at the house in Viborgskaya. The men I wanted were waiting for me in an upper room and I gathered that they were not in the least surprised. I had been supplied with photographs of a number of them taken from the former Tsarist police files, but I had no need of them. Trotsky I knew well by sight. I had listened to him Sunday after Sunday for the past two months denouncing England from the balcony outside Kshesinskaya's house. There was no conversation. I read out the order and requested them to accompany me, and they did so without a word. According to instructions we drove straight to the Ministry of the Interior and I handed them over to the militia guards.

But my prisoners were released the same day by order of Kerensky, who had returned the previous evening from the front and had, I was told, observed me bringing them in from a window in the Winter Palace. I have never seen men so mad as Rak and Pereverseff when they learned what Kerensky had done. Kerensky, of course, had his reasons. These men had been comrades with him in the struggle to bring about the revolution. It was unfortunate that they were no longer united with him in a common purpose, but it was impossible that they should be punished by the people with whom they had served. Also the revolutionary Left was nervous of the situation which was developing. Once repressive measures were begun against any section of the Left, there was no telling how they might go on. They imagined a dictatorship of the Right emerging and enforcing a discipline which might be little less intolerable to them than the discipline they had so recently cast off.

Moreover, Kerensky had returned from the front demanding something very much approaching dictatorial powers in order to get the army again under control. Dictatorship at the front might be necessary to protect the revolution from the Germans ; if so, there was all the more reason for preserving forces in Petrograd capable of defending the revolution against dictatorship in the rear. Therefore the Left opposed the disarming of the Petrograd workers and the Government, alarmed by the discovery of its own dangerous impulse to rule, hurriedly drew back. The Bolshevik movement was reprieved.

Counter-Espionage had occupied the offices of *Pravda* and confiscated all the documents they could find. Everything was ordered to be restored. The soldiers who had taken part in the rising were all released. The workmen were allowed to retain their arms, and the Bolshevik leaders were left free to carry on their propaganda as before. Pereverseff resigned in disgust and the general public climbed down off the pendulum in complete dismay. Almost simultaneously came the news that the army of democracy was retiring before the Germans in a positive orgy of cowardice, drunkenness, murder, and rape, and in a belated effort to control the rout the Government restored the death penalty at the front. But if nothing short of cannon levelled at their backs would have made the demoralized units of the Russian army move forward a few weeks before, there were numerous well-aimed German cannons at their backs in the retreat, and threatening them with their officers' revolvers was like using a pop-gun to stop a horde of elephants running amok. Even when the Germans halted out of breath, the Russian infantry went steadily on. Ivan was on the move and nothing could stop him now till he reached his own kail-yard.

Nevertheless, despite the torrent of desertions from the infantry—men were not deserting singly or in bands but in thousands at a time—an army still held on. The cavalry, the artillery—grimly fascinated by having for the first time in their lives good guns and as many shells as they could want to fire—cyclist battalions, engineers, all sections of the original army which had suffered least in nerves and man-power from the wasteful fighting of the previous years and whose military efficiency had consequently been least affected by unwilling drafts from the propaganda-ridden rear, had still the desire to show the Germans that there was a kick left in Russia yet. They were not peasants, and were immune from the peasant infantryman's fear that the land promised by the revolution might be divided up in his absence and he be left without a share. With their better education, too, they were able to see Russia as a whole and to feel dishonour and pain so long as any part of it remained

in German hands. For the peasant who had never known why he fought, Russia began and ended with his own fields. Their numbers were small, terribly small compared with the army that had been and was steadily melting away, but the German and Austrian armies opposing them had been greatly reduced owing to the pressure of the Allies on the other fronts, and it was conceivable that they would at least be able to hold their own. There was still some pro-war enthusiasm in the rear, too.

Shocked by the incapacity of the Provisional Government to take a firm stand against the peace propaganda of the Bolsheviks, or to stem the break-up of the army, movements were arising among middle-class elements in the cities with a view to supplying the initiative which the Government lacked. Women's battalions were being recruited and were drilling with energy and purpose. Wounded soldiers were forming themselves into shock groups preparatory to returning to the front. An association formed under the presidency of a certain Colonel Mouravieff, a young officer in the early thirties, was at work recruiting soldiers and officer members and putting them under oath to return to the front and fight so long as required to by the Allied command. The intention of the Association was to form a nucleus in each military unit round which the more reliable elements among the soldiers could be gathered, each one being admitted to the oath. There was no counter-revolutionary aim behind this Association. In fact, it had the support of certain members of the Government, principally Boris Savinkoff, once organizer of the assassinations of Plehve and the Grand Duke Sergius, now acting Minister of War. All this was hopefully suggestive of the possibility of saving something out of Russia which would continue to give the Germans occupation on their eastern front.

But it needed cohesion and leadership. When Kerensky and the Provisional Government declined to proceed against the Bolsheviks they lost the allegiance of the executive members of Counter-Espionage. They could scarcely expect to hold it after the way we had been let down. Rak, as usual, was our thinker and leader, and he came out of the trough of despair into which Kerensky's failure had plunged us with the scheme for the formation of the Military League. This was to be an association of officers pledged to resist any attempt to restore the monarchy, but determined to win control of the revolution and use it for the successful prosecution of the war. Our chosen leader was Colonel Gorlenko, my superior at the Ministry of Transport. Gorlenko was a cavalry officer who had married one of the most popular singers at the Marinsky Opera House. Wounded early in the war, he had been given charge of the cavalry school and a large number of the officers serving with

the cavalry had passed through his hands. They liked and trusted him, and since it was on the cavalry we should largely have to rely he was a good choice. With Rak to organize the artillery officers, our leading personnel was complete.

The lesser leaders were all drawn from the Knights of St. George, holders of the Russian equivalent of the Victoria Cross. The members of Counter-Espionage, Vlassieff, myself and others, remained in the background. Our functions were to assist the official members to make contact with the different pro-war groups and to keep a watchful eye on the enemy, the Bolsheviks. The aim of the League was the creation of a military dictatorship which would substitute itself for the Provisional Government, fight the war to a finish, and abdicate in favour of a nationally elected responsible government.

But the situation in Russia was far too desperate to be saved by a Military League. For every member of the League or of Mouravieff's association in the army at the front pledged to fight to a finish, there were ten, twenty, thirty soldiers whose stomach for fighting grew smaller with each new day of war. Each day found the notion of peace becoming more attractive to them, found them a little readier to listen to the Bolshevik syren song, the strangely attractive argument that the war was being waged solely to satisfy the ambitious and fill the pockets of a small number of war lords and money lords, and that when the people of Russia had once declared for peace the peoples of all the other warring realms would have their eyes opened and would rise up against their lords and cry, "Enough !" to the slaughter, too.

To the Russian, still warm inside with the intoxication of having revolted against his lords, there was a special insidiousness about this appeal to his innate love of a dramatic gesture, and when it coincided with the clamour of his own war-weariness, it required a tougher, sterner nature than that of the average Russian to resist it for long without strong external assistance. For that purpose our appeal to them to stand loyally by their country's allies was pitifully weak. The Bolsheviks countered with the questions : Loyalty to what ?—and answered it with a fairly accurate statement of the known Allied aims : to wrest her colonies from Germany, to take Palestine and Arabia from the Turks, to dismember the Austrian Empire, to humble every German in the dust. The Russian had lost sympathy with these ideas.

"Peace without annexations or contributions," he had been chanting for the last six months. He wanted nothing from anybody outside Russia but to be left alone and to be allowed to take the Germans for his brothers and not his slaves. So the Bolsheviks were

able to make loyalty to the Allies look like loyalty to a bandit gang and disloyalty to the higher ideals of the new Russia itself, and when the poor Russian found again that the new ideas coincided with the dearest wishes of his heart—to save his skin and be at home—the Bolsheviks had us beaten at every turn.

For every member of the middle and professional classes on whom we could count for support in the rear, there were ten, twenty, thirty, a hundred soldiers, workers, peasants, who for one reason or another saw in our policy the frustration of their hopes. The soldiers in the rear were completely lost to us. Bolshevik or neutral, they were determined not to be sent to the front. Bolshevik or neutral, the workers wanted a new status in industry, new wage rates and conditions, new freedoms, and were not prepared to work with a will in support of anything until these had been obtained. The peasants wanted peace because their war was already over: the revolution had promised them a Constituent Assembly which would give them ownership of the land.

The peasants were neither Bolshevik nor anti-Bolshevik. They cared for nobody but themselves. But their withdrawal from co-operation with the rest of Russia was causing grave famine in the towns, embarrassing the Government, and raising fresh demands among the townspeople for peace. The food shortage which had produced the strikes which had in turn produced the March revolution in Petrograd was threatening to produce a new upheaval. Owing to the labour troubles output in the factories had fallen to impossibly low levels. Even if the peasants would give up their grain, the towns had lamentably little to give in exchange. There was nothing now plentiful in Russia except munitions of war. There was unrest everywhere and among ninety-five per cent of the population a deep conviction that the panacea for all their troubles was peace.

The misrule in Petrograd was a measure of the chaos everywhere. Among the crowds of army deserters who had flocked to the capital were many of the type who had been committing the worst excesses of the retreat, and they had taken advantage of the absence of an effective police force to form themselves into pillaging bands. Hold-ups in the street were of common occurrence. Residents of the blocks of flats in which all Petrograd lives formed themselves into self-protection committees and warning bells were installed in many of them connecting each flat with all the others in the block.

One night Vlassieff and I accompanied an officer friend of his, who had just arrived from the front, to a night-club to eat and drink. Owing to the food shortage which affected all classes a host of these

clubs had sprung up, as much to satisfy the hunger of those who could afford to pay the excessive prices as to serve them with prohibited liquor. In the middle of our meal the door was thrown open and three armed men strode in, calling to us to put up our hands. Our table was close to the door and we were actually behind the men, who were brandishing revolvers at the crowd of diners. Terrified women snatched off bracelets and ear-rings and sought to hide them beneath the tables and in the inner parts of their clothes.

This particular raid ended almost before it had begun, however, for Vlassieff picked up our bottle of port off the table and crashed it down on the nearest robber's head. Almost in the same instant our officer friend had drawn his revolver and shot another of them through the body. The third man beat a hasty retreat. This was the Petrograd of August and September 1917, the Petrograd in which the Military League was born and almost immediately died.

In spite of the odds against us, it must not be supposed that we were willing to see the hopelessness of our endeavour as clearly as it can be seen now. When men like Rak and Gorlenko had schemed for revolution, it was of being free like English gentlemen they had dreamed. They had imagined an ordered political system under which the people of Russia would naturally elect to be guided and governed by men like themselves, Russia's governing class, which Tsardom had kept out of its inheritance. This had been their dream. Whether they had been Liberals, Social Revolutionaries, Social Democrats was a matter of temperament and education, of their social and economic opportunities and obstacles. Details of the system might differ, but the personal aim had been the same.

It was of this dream they were being robbed by the madness of the Bolshevik leaders in seeking to ride themselves to power on the uncontrolled passions of the mob. It was impossible for them to agree that the world of their dreams could be pushed out of their grasp by the pressure of a crowd of misled workmen and peasants foolishly struggling to fish out of the whirlpool a selfish dream of their own. There were supplementary considerations, of course. So far as land and wages and suchlike things were concerned, it had been their intention to give in more or less measure in accordance with their political theories listed above. But it was evidently now the intention of the peasants and workers to take rather than to receive, and this was opening the door to a chaos which they could not be expected to endure. It was imperative for them that Russia should be saved to become a country of responsible, respectable government like England, like America, like France. It was impera-

tive, therefore, that Russia should be made, willing or unwilling, to continue to march in step with the countries on which she must be moulded and burn out her new madnesses by associating with them in the discipline and glory of victory in the war. It was obvious that it would need a miracle to help us, but it was our only hope.

In preparation for the coming struggle with the Bolsheviks, we began by attempting to have the large stores of ammunition, which were still in the rear, removed as far as possible to the front. There was method in this, for when a man was converted to the Bolshevik point of view he usually departed for the rear. As a corollary to this, munitions arriving from abroad were stopped at Archangel. But the Bolsheviks took a hand in this game and one of the munition ships which we were holding, the *Bakaritza*, was blown up. Rak sent me to Archangel to investigate, but it was a hopeless task. The shore workers were Bolshevik to a man, a tribute to the work begun so long ago by my friend Madame M——.

My old Scots captain I found was dead, but there was now an official Allied representative at Archangel.

Major R—— had performed wonders in handling the immense supplies from England and America which had been landed at Archangel during the last two years and nobody knew the situation in the north better than he. Major R—— was frankly scared. There had already been Bolshevik risings in various parts of the northern territories, and if they got control of the railroads from Archangel and Murmansk (this had been built since Major R——'s self-appointed unofficial predecessor had pointed out to me the need for it in the first month of the war) not only would Petrograd be cut off from communication with the outside world, but all means of sending Allied troops to hold back the Germans should they decide to advance into Russia would be stopped until they had been dealt with, which might be too late. Equally dangerous was it that they might capture the stores of all kinds lying at these ports.

When I was about to leave again, Major R—— took me across the bay to the railway station in his private tug-boat and on the way asked me for my cap. I handed it to him, and to my surprise he ripped open the lining, inserted a sealed envelope which he drew out of his pocket, replaced the lining carefully and handed the cap back.

"When you get back to Petrograd," he said, "take that letter from me to the British Embassy and hand it over to the Ambassador himself or the First Secretary, nobody else. I'm not telling you the contents, but you know the situation here and maybe you can guess. If they act on it they may save Russia, so guard it with your life."

My guess at the contents of the letter to the British Embassy was that Major R—— was asking permission to arm the Czech prisoners in the prison-camp at Vologda, the railway junction half-way between Archangel and Petrograd, from the military stores in his control and use them as a force with which to try to hold the north. There was also most likely a plea for immediate intervention by the Japanese, coming across Siberia from Vladivostok. He had suggested these as possibilities to me in one of our talks. Major R—— was no scare-monger. He was convinced that the Bolsheviks would attempt another coup soon and had no opinion at all of the ability of the Provisional Government, the Military League, or anyone else in Russia to put them down without outside military aid. The Czech prisoners were, of course, eager for the Allies to win the war so that their country could be freed from the Austrian yoke and several thousands of their fellow-countrymen had fought with the Russian army in a special brigade.

Major R—— had adjured me to guard his letter with my life, so I kept my eyes well open on the train. There were two fellows of whom I was specially suspicious because of the interest I fancied they were taking in me and the number of times they passed the compartment which I was occupying alone. At last after a long peer through the glass window from the corridor they plucked up courage to open the door, and simultaneously I opened the other door and, cap in hand, jumped out on to the line. As the train had been jogging along slowly for the past hour there was no great courage required for that. I got off with a bruised hand and walked the six miles to Vologda, wondering whether my supposed assailants had really been Bolshevik emissaries or only men coming to ask me for a match. Anyhow, I was not molested in Vologda and reached Petrograd without further incident.

I went to the British Embassy at once and asked for the Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan. I was informed he was not available, but that I could see a secretary. I passed through two green baize doors into a room where the secretary waited and I handed over my despatch and was left alone. After about ten minutes he returned, evidently perturbed.

"Has anyone seen you coming here?" he asked.

I replied in the negative. His tense expression relaxed with obvious relief and he showed me out of the Embassy by the back door after carefully peeping out into the deserted street.

Early in October the Bolshevik Trotsky was elected President of the Soviet. Immediately the Bolsheviks faced the Government with a direct and insulting challenge. At their instigation the Soviet announced that the workmen and soldiers whom they

claimed to represent no longer had faith in the power of the Government to defend Petrograd and that the Soviet would now take the responsibility for the defence of the capital upon itself. A committee was set up under the chairmanship of a Bolshevik named Antonoff and delegates were sent to take control of each unit of the garrison and of the factories engaged in making arms. The Soviet committee at once put a stop to our withdrawals of rifles and ammunition from the local arsenals. The meaning of all this was unmistakable. The Bolsheviks were about to oust the Government and were calmly taking over control of all that remained of the Government's military machine.

The thing to be done, of course, was to declare Bolshevism illegal and arrest the Bolshevik leaders at once. A meeting of the Military League was held to discuss the question of our taking action on our own, but Colonel Gorlenko advised against it, pointing out that it would be interpreted as a counter-revolutionary stroke by the mass of the people and we should find ourselves without support. The Government alone could act, and eventually it was decided to send a deputation of the younger men to implore Kerensky to save the revolution while there was yet time. It was Rak's idea that Kerensky might listen to us young men without resentment and, if he wished, would know how to act on our suggestions without loss of dignity, but that he would suspect the older men of resenting him and reject their views to show them he was not afraid. Kerensky, it must be remembered, had just turned thirty. Vlassieff was chosen leader of the deputation because he had been schoolmates with Kerensky, and I was a member *ex-officio*, as it were, being the youngest in the group. None of us was older than Kerensky himself.

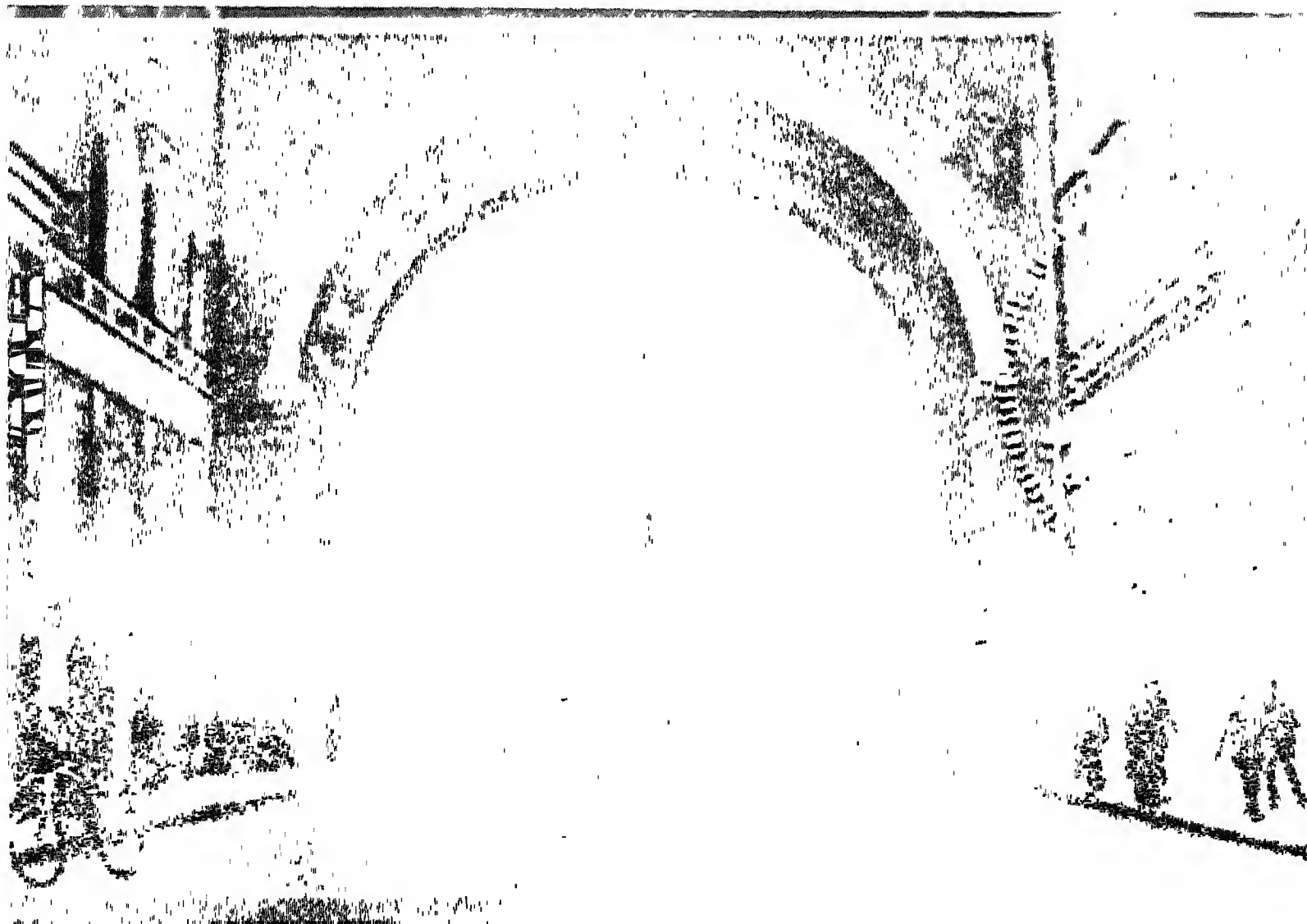
We were received in Kerensky's room in the Winter Palace, which had once been the study of the ex-Tsar's father, Alexander III. We knew that he also slept at night in Alexander's bed. Kerensky's own name was Alexander and the malicious were referring to him as "Alexander IV". We all knew the man well enough by sight, the sallow, theatrically pale face, the close-cropped *en brosse* hair, the too intense eyes and fierce mouth, the fussy, over-impatient air with which he strode from meetings of the Cabinet and sank into Nicholas II's luxurious Rolls-Royce, the husky voice jerking out hurried orders as if tomorrow were a train which he had never had more than a minute to catch—all these had combined over the last six months to give us a contemptuous opinion of him as a self-charged, self-primed Napoleon, ever on the cock but incapable of going off. We had come to hate this perpetual pose of his of being the human dynamo of the revolution when we knew that off the platform he never even sparked. God had given him a tongue and

a head full of wonderful words, and while Russia was standing in awe before a torrent of words he had seemed to the people to be a god himself. If a touch of ruthlessness had been added to his make-up, a hint of Cæsar, a shade of Machiavelli, he might have begun to be the Napoleon of which a part of him dreamed.

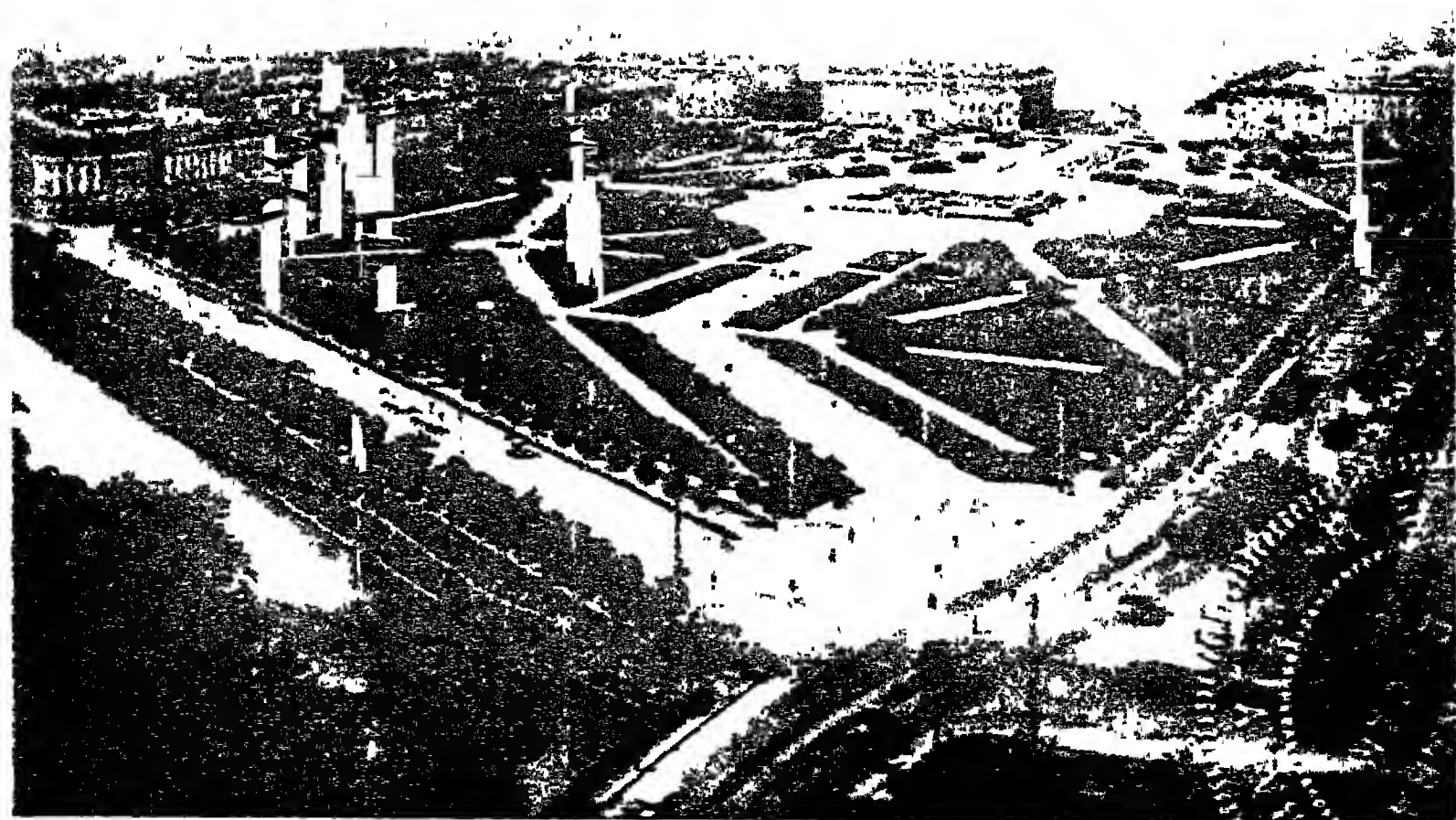
But his vision of Empire was based on books and not bullets. He had the idea that he could ride all storms with an appeal to men's minds. He sought a dazzling Holy Grail of an intellectual formula before which all conflicts, whether of peace or war, hunger or riches, greed or altruism, should immediately be reconciled. His Napoleonic complex took the form of believing that he was the pure Sir Galahad to whom the vision of the Grail inevitably must come. But even if visions had been the stuff on which the Russian people could have been fed, Kerensky was not as big as his vision, and the vision he sought was constantly having to be shrunk down to admit of its inclusion within the rather narrow limits of himself. It was the difference between the largeness of the vision and the smallness of the man that had been the secret of his refusal up to now to deal resolutely with the Bolsheviks. There was a place for Bolshevism in the vision. It was inconceivable that it could not be included in the formula and made to circle with the other planets of politics around the sun of Kerensky. Consequently it could not be exterminated or even strenuously fought. But it was too narrow, too exclusive to become the formula itself, also much too aggressive, and it had its own Napoleons who needed not Kerensky. Consequently it could not be embraced.

Thus had arisen the dilemma in the mind of Kerensky which had held us inactive all these months while the leaders of the Bolsheviks, purged of all such indecisions by their iron creed, prepared for war, and Kerensky played out his act of Napoleon in a Methodist preacher's frock-coat, alternately strutting imperially up and down Alexander III's study and wrestling with the devil in Alexander's bed.

He received us now in the frock-coat with three fingers of the right hand resting in the bottom of the lapel and the arm across his chest in the traditional Napoleonic attitude. Not a smile crossed his set face even when he and Vlassieff greeted one another by their Christian names and shook hands. The sallowness of his face, the coat, and the tense expression made him seem so much older than any of the rest of us that I had the impression we were a set of school-boys come to ask the head for a holiday which we scarcely expected to get. Vlassieff introduced us one by one, stating our names, age and rank, and then launched into his plea for the immediate arrest of the Bolshevik leaders. He spoke simply and eloquently, referring



The famous Winter Palace in which Mr. Blair, with a deputation of the youngest members of the Military League, pleaded with Kerensky to allow them to kill Lenin and Trotsky and the other Bolshevik leaders.



The Field of Mars in Petrograd, now named the Square of the Victims of the Revolution, where Mr. Blair escaped from his captors on the morning of the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution.



to us all as ready to lay down our lives to defend the revolution, denouncing the Bolsheviks as traitors who, if successful, would plunge the country into chaos, leave it at the mercy of the Germans, and expose Russia to the perpetual reproach of every nation which had pledged itself to the Allied cause. The Bolsheviks, he said, had deserted the revolution, malevolently undermined all efforts to improve the situation of the country and the lot of the people, and were now determined to destroy the democratic principles for which the revolution had been made by an appeal to force. If the Provisional Government still stood for the democratic principle it was their duty to defend it. He ended by naming the day on which the Bolsheviks intended to seize the power—October 25. Others among us supported him with shorter, more passionate pleadings.

Kerensky heard us out, and with his hand again in his lapel blasted all our hopes with one hoarse, passionate sentence :

“It shall never be said of me that I stooped to use force against a man because he does not share my political views !”

It was crazy but it was sublime. All the ardour of which the man was capable was ringing through the room. It seemed as if we had offended him to the bottom of his soul.

Nevertheless, some preparations were made for resistance. Two cyclist battalions of loyal troops were called back from the front and armed guards of cadets from the military schools placed in the Government buildings. Opinion in the Military League was that nothing could be done for the Provisional Government while Kerensky remained in it. Most of the officers had washed their hands of the whole affair and were lost in pessimistic apathy. The women's battalions announced their intention of defending the capital against the Bolsheviks and marched through the streets in national array on the twenty-second. But on the same day the Cossack cavalry announced that in the coming struggle, if any, they would remain neutral. So it looked as if the Bolsheviks were going to have things all their own way.

On the morning of October 25 Petrograd was perfectly quiet. Trains were running, businesses were open, the usual crowds were in the streets. Shortly before ten o'clock I walked from my flat in Tavritcheskaya Street to the Anglo-Russian Bank on Nevsky Prospect to draw out some money. I had no particular plans or arrangements with anybody for that morning and my intention was to proceed from the Bank to the Ministry of Transport and await events like everybody else. Opposite the Bank is the Kazan Cathedral and in the square outside the Cathedral stood an armoured car, by no means an unusual sight. I spent half an hour in the Bank altogether, and when I came out I found that the armoured car had

moved out of the square into the street and that some soldiers were now standing on the pavement just at the corner of Singer House and the bridge over the Moika. I passed them and was almost across the bridge when I remembered that I had left some books which I had been carrying in the Bank. As I turned and began to retrace my steps a clock struck half-past ten. When I came abreast of the soldiers one of them stepped forward and stopped me. The Bolshevik occupation of Petrograd had begun.

CHAPTER II

THE SCARLET PIMPERNELS OF PETROGRAD

I GREETED the soldier who halted me at the end of the bridge with a smile. Really, it was a tribute of amused congratulation which one could not withhold. One was tempted to think that perhaps the Bolsheviks ought to be allowed to govern after all, for they were apparently the only people in Petrograd who knew what they were after or were capable of organizing any operation and putting it through according to plan. The effrontery of the proceeding was dazzling. Just an armoured car waiting for a clock to strike and now this bayonet at my chest. The smile, however, was a tactical mistake, for the soldier chose to misinterpret it as misplaced levity directed at him, and when he had demanded my name and occupation and learned that I was a servant of the Provisional Government employed at the Ministry of Transport he placed me under arrest and I was marched off to the Pavlovski Barracks on the Field of Mars. Luckily for me, my escort was a weak-kneed little fellow and stupid to boot, and passing behind one of the wood-piles on the field I was able to give him a push and the slip. I hid among the wood-piles until he stopped scratching his bullet head and gave up looking for me, after which I crept out and made my way by a devious route to Vlassieff's flat.

His wife told me he had gone to the Ministry of War. I had no difficulty in getting to the Ministry—the Bolshevik soldiers seemed to be stopping pedestrians only at the bridges—but when I arrived here I found several companies of the Pavlovski Regiment preparing to occupy it, so I stayed outside after learning from a looker-on that most of the officers had already left. A rapid tour of several of the other Government buildings revealed that they were all either occupied or about to be occupied, so I concluded that my safest plan would be to remain a simple citizen in the streets until I had learned what exactly was to happen.

I was obviously not alone in that decision, for I recognized quite a number of officers and officials whom I knew, and all were affecting to be disinterested onlookers just as I. In fact, all through the morning and afternoon, but for the faintly expectant look of the people on the pavements, there was nothing to distinguish

this particular day from almost any other since the revolution. There was much less excitement than there had been on the first day of the July rising. There was no demonstrating by the soldiers or workmen. Perhaps the only difference was the absence of cars from the streets owing to the fact that the Government had collected all the cars they could lay hands on the previous evening and stored them in the Palace Square, and the Bolsheviks had stolen all the magnetos from them overnight. The Ministers of the Provisional Government were assembled in the Winter Palace under the protection of a mixed force of young cadets from the military schools, Cossacks, some of the women's battalion, and a few volunteers, all except the Prime Minister, Napoleon Kerensky, who had fled. I had no desire to be mixed up in anything that should happen at the Palace, but even if I had I could not have got in, for it was now surrounded by Bolshevik troops.

I went to a little restaurant where I had been accustomed to meet Rak and Vlassieff for lunch, but there were neither of them there. However, I met a non-Bolshevik member of the Soviet and he gave me the news that Kerensky had fled to Pskoff to lead the troops which had been summoned by the Government from the front, that the Government was determined to remain in office, and that the non-Bolshevik members of the Soviet were forming a committee in support of the Government. He considered that the Bolsheviks, who were in constant session at their new headquarters in the Smolny Institute, would be overcome again in two or three days. The cyclist troops which the Government had brought from the front some days ago for their defence had deserted to the Bolsheviks on the previous night.

Early in the evening the sound of heavy guns was heard. I went out to see what was happening and found that a cruiser was shelling the Winter Palace, where the Provisional Government was still sitting, from the river. Guns from the Fortress of Peter and Paul were also joining in. I joined the crowds which were watching from a safe distance. The shelling ceased about midnight without much effective damage being done, and some time later sailors and soldiers were seen to have entered the Palace. Half an hour afterwards the Ministers were led through the crowds, which hurled abuse at them, on their way to imprisonment in the Peter and Paul fortress, to be followed by a pathetic-looking bunch of cadets and uniformed women, the remnant of the Palace defenders, who were marched under guard to the Pavlovski Barracks. The Bolshevik possession of Petrograd seemed now to be complete.

As far as I could ascertain the victory appeared to have been very nearly bloodless. Originally the Palace forces had numbered

something over a thousand, but earlier in the day many of the cadets had gone home when they discovered that the Government had made no provision for them to be fed and the Cossacks had also asked to be allowed to leave in pursuance of their policy of remaining neutral in this conflict. The few cadets and women who were left had been without any real leadership and had put up a very half-hearted resistance when the Bolshevik forces broke in through an unguarded door. Nobody had been killed and not more than a dozen had been wounded during the bombardment and afterwards. It was a small price, after all, which the supporters of the right were having to pay for the criminal ineptitude of their Government ; so I forsook the jostling company of the crowds in the streets and went home, not displeased with the day, to my bed.

I was not a bit ashamed of the part I had myself played in the day's activities, even though I had simply skulked about the streets pretending to have no more interest in the Bolshevik shelling of the Winter Palace than I should have had in the antics of the demon bowler at a village cricket match, and I am quite sure my attitude was shared by every person in Petrograd who was not definitely on the Bolshevik side. For us this Bolshevik insurrection was no more than an unfortunate but useful interlude in which the scene-shifters had taken it upon themselves to interrupt the play which was not to their liking and were forcibly clearing the actors away. Well, we had become heartily sick of these actors, too.

Next day I contacted Vlassieff, but he had little more news than I. Troops definitely were on the way and the Bolsheviks were getting ready to defend the city. Some of the bolder spirits among the officers Vlassieff had seen yesterday had announced their intention of joining the relieving force as soon as it came near enough to Petrograd, but Vlassieff was of the opinion that it was our duty to remain in the capital and lie low until we saw how things were going to shape. His one piece of real news was that the imperturbable Rak had offered his services to the Bolsheviks in Smolny and been accepted. We had a good contact, therefore, inside Bolshevik headquarters. Later that day the Bolsheviks announced their programme—an immediate offer of peace, the immediate transfer of all land to the peasants, government to be carried on by the Soviets, and the summoning of a Constituent Assembly—and telegraphed the armies at the front, calling on them to support the new revolution.

For the next three days we lived on the reports of the approach of the army which Kerensky was bringing to drive the Bolsheviks out. On the third day of the Bolshevik coup it had reached Gatchina, some twenty miles from Petrograd ; on the following day it occupied Tsarskoe Selo. It was just at the door of Petrograd now, and on the

next day, a Sunday, fighting broke out again inside the town. It was a poorly organized counter-rising stimulated by a committee set up by one of the moderates of the Soviet. Almost the only participants were the boy-cadets of the military schools. They beat off the Bolshevik soldiery who were guarding the schools, and captured the Central Telephone Exchange. The Bolsheviks rushed up artillery and by afternoon the cadet rising had been suppressed, this time with considerable losses among the cadets. It was all over before most of us who might have joined in had we known of it in advance had time to find out what it was all about. On Monday the relieving force attacked, but were driven back by sailors and workmen who had built strong entrenchments outside the city. By evening they were in retreat back to Gatchina. And then the miserable truth came out. The relieving army on which we had been building such high hopes had never been more than a few hundred Cossacks, a mere raiding force which the defenders had outnumbered by a dozen and more to one !

Evidently the Bolsheviks had won over the army with their declaration for peace. Meanwhile, we had learned from the newspapers, Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik, that Moscow had fallen to the Bolsheviks, after a stubborn defence of the Kremlin—but again only by cadets—and other cities as well. The next news was that the Cossacks at Gatchina had surrendered ; that the Commander-in-Chief of the armies at the front, General Doukhonin, had forbidden the movement of any of his troops ; and that Kerensky, exchanging his frock-coat for a sailor's suit, had fled, no one knew where. The Congress of Soviets met and appointed a government of Commissars of the People, with Lenin as president, Trotsky in charge of foreign affairs, and Ensign Krylenko of what remained of the army. The possibility of organized opposition seemed to exist nowhere, and the triumph of the Bolsheviks looked disturbingly complete. We had begun by giving the Bolsheviks days ; we now decided they would probably last a few weeks. Counter measures would not come in Petrograd ; but all Russia had not gone Bolshevik, and somewhere soon the opposition must arise. We could but wait.

But not in idleness, for an opportunity of work had arisen. In spite of the total absence of active opposition to the new regime in the city, Petrograd was not at peace. Passive opposition there was in plenty. Few of the official and professional classes were at work, refusing to do anything which might contribute to the stabilization of the new rule. They stood about in the streets in large crowds for mutual protection and shouted abuse at the Bolshevik soldiers and supporters who passed. Occasionally when they became too abusive an armed car would come along and send them scattering with a

volley fired over their heads. There was more active warfare from the other side. Murder and destruction were beginning to stalk the streets. The spirit of vengeance was loose in mobs over which the new government had no control. Sailors, soldiers, workmen, and hooligan hangers-on had been supplied with arms in order to oust from possession the classes whom history and Bolshevik propaganda had taught them to hate. This was no new class-hatred which the Bolsheviks had stirred up. Karl Marx had given it a new impetus and supplied it with a new justification, but the basis was age-old. Bolshevism for them was a gloss of the mind on an uprush from the bowels.

Fundamentally they were peasants, and it was the hatred of the peasant for his landlord, of the serf for his master, that this new revolution had released in them, and which refused to be cheated of its revenge merely because the landlords and masters were running away. They had suffered when they were down ; now the other should suffer since he was down. If Communist philosophy supplied the excuse, let the peasant himself, with all his memories, supply the hand and the weapon and the ruthlessness with which they should be used. Passions had been roused and needed victims before they could be stilled. Consequently, in Petrograd, the hunt was in cry for anyone who could be identified as a member of the oppressing class. It was the sailors from the Baltic fleet who were the worst elements. Robbed of the opportunity of killing on behalf of the old regime in the war, they were now determined to make up for lost time in support of the new. They were supported by bands of soldiers who, in default of other occupation and too far from their homes to desert, had taken to pillage as an improvement on robbing each other at cards, and all the riff-raff which a capital city inevitably collects.

The Bolshevik authorities had as yet no organization for keeping the hooligan elements under control, and the sailors had to be allowed the licence which they were exacting as the price of their support. The victims of these roving bands were chiefly officers, when they could be recognized, and the cadets who alone had attempted to frustrate the Bolshevik seizure of power, and on whom, for that reason and because they were all members of the privileged and possessing classes, fell the brunt of the mob's hate. They were all boys of seventeen to twenty years old and their plight was extreme. They were being chased from every refuge and tortured and murdered in cold blood. We decided to set up an organization to give as many of them as possible the means of escape.

The headquarters of the organization was in my flat and its members were Vlassieff, a lawyer named Eber, a certain Captain

Vidiakin, a Jewish clothes dealer, and myself. The organization had three departments. First, we had to get in touch with the boys whom we were anxious to help ; Vlassieff and I chiefly attended to that. Second, they had to be supplied with clothes and documents to enable them to get past the Bolshevik guards and patrols ; the documents were the department of Vidiakin, the clothes of the Jewish dealer. Thirdly, they had to be got out of the town, but this was comparatively easy once the clothes and documents were obtained. If the case had special complications, Eber had to come to the rescue. His great value to the organization was that he was a member of the Social Democratic Party and had been their chief legal luminary before the revolution. Although a Menshevik, he was *persona grata* at Smolny and could get travel passes and other conveniences which it would have been dangerous for us to try to fake. He lived in the flat above mine so he was conveniently situated for co-operating with us.

Captain Vidiakin was perhaps our most important member because he had the skill of an artist in penmanship and a positive genius for turning a clean sheet of ordinary paper into almost any kind of document you cared to ask him to copy, from an imperial ukase with all the seals to an out-of-work street-sweeper's house-committee certificate reeking with genuineness down to the smell of his pockets and the last spots of filth and grease. His father was a rich merchant in Archangel and in the early days of the war when Vidiakin was coming to Petrograd to join his regiment the little Scots captain had given him a letter of introduction to me. His regiment having put all its officers on the retired list after the July offensive, Vidiakin, tired of waiting with several thousand fellow officers for appointment to other regiments which would probably vote them out again as soon as they arrived, had come to Petrograd in the hope of finding a friend on the General Staff who might have helped him to another post, but had arrived on the afternoon of October 23 to find the General Staff all gone and the buildings in charge of a non-commissioned officer of the Pavlovski Guards. After a narrow escape from being thrown in the Neva by some sailors who chased him through the streets for more than a mile, he had sought refuge with me. He was a competent draughtsman and colourist, had dabbled in a multitude of arts and crafts, and had a knack for copying a signature which would have made him a menace to society if he had not been the honestest fellow alive.

With Rak in Smolny able to secure the signatures of the different commissars for us, also impressions of the Bolshevik rubber stamps, Vidiakin had everything he required. We had no need to make our own rubber stamps. We bought them from the man who made

them for the Bolsheviks. In the same way we purchased a whole collection of regimental seals, and thus provided we were able to equip our cadets with complete sets of papers either as clerks or other demi-working-class types, in which case they were given house-committee certificates, references from past employers, and other personal papers a clerk might carry, or as privates of some regiment still at the front, when the papers included usually a permit from the commanding officer or regimental committee allowing them to travel.

Our Jewish clothes-dealer could be relied upon to get us any kind of outfit we wanted. Through Rak we had obtained a copy of a list prepared by the Bolsheviks of the cadets who had taken part in the defence of the Palace and other buildings, and who were therefore on the run, and by introducing ourselves, directly or through our friends, to their parents and friends, we were able to assure them that our offer of help was genuine and to persuade them to leave their temporary hiding-places and put themselves in our hands. Our object was to enable them to escape to the south, to the Cossack regions, from which it was expected that a counter-move against the Bolsheviks would shortly be emanating. I had read Baroness Orczy, and in our lighter moments we called ourselves "The Scarlet Pimpernels of Petrograd".

The temptation to take risks and also to play jokes on the Bolsheviks assailed us frequently, and sometimes we were of the opinion that we were taking too much trouble altogether over these manufactured papers of ours. A very large number of the guards they were intended to deceive could neither read nor write. As a matter of course they demanded papers. If the victim looked what he claimed to be and there were no other circumstances to rouse the soldier's suspicions, he could get away with any paper bearing any kind of a stamp. At the same time it was necessary to have papers that would bear scrutiny because if the test were not passed at the first glance the holder of the papers would certainly be held until someone came along who could read. So far as the signatures went, had we not possessed the advantage of Vidiakin's faultless penmanship, we could have taken risks with illegible scrawls, for every jumped-up jack-in-office was signing papers all day long. Paper-signing was almost as much the characteristic of this new revolution as speech-making had been of the old. It was a point of honour with us, however, never to send anyone out without a full set of papers bearing only the best signatures and these of a kind by which the signatories themselves must truly have been taken in.

The Bolsheviks had formed a special body of Red Guards to defend their revolution, but after four or five weeks, in the beginning

of December, they began to reconstitute the police in the form of the Cheka. There was a sinister sound to our ears about a number of the things the new regime was embarking on. The new Cheka, for example, was not being recruited exclusively from members of the Bolshevik Party, but was opening its doors to members of the former Tsarist police. These men had a skill all their own and had learned under the Tsar to serve a master's bidding without questioning his motives or his means. Against these professional bloodhounds our work would be much more dangerous than before. There were hints of stern measures to be employed against those who resisted the new government by passive or active sabotage.

House-to-house searches for evidences of counter-revolutionary activity, of food and money hoarding, were being instituted, and we were discovering that the Bolsheviks had other ideas for Russia than the mere stopping of the war, negotiations towards which had already been begun and an armistice signed. In many of the Petrograd factories the workers were replying to the owners' passive resistance of the Government by driving them out and appointing committees of control, and Lenin had issued decrees nationalizing the banks and the land. The army officers were paying now for the apathy with which most of them had greeted the Bolshevik coup, for the principle of election had been introduced and those who were not elected by the men had the choice of remaining as ordinary soldiers or of getting out and supporting themselves as best they could.

Around this time it was reported in one of the newspapers that thirty-five officers of the Guard had been given work as porters at the Nikolas railway-station in Petrograd. The stunned middle-class population of the capital was being roused to the realization that the theories of Karl Marx were beginning to translate themselves into disagreeable facts. With the announcement of the land nationalization decree the allegiance of the Social Revolutionary Party, the strongest single party in Russia representing all the peasant interests, had been won, and the claim of the Bolsheviks to have the support of the workers, the soldiers, and the peasants—something like ninety per cent and perhaps more of the population—although a very large part of that was tentative—was an uncomfortable fact which could not be burked. A nightmare element had crept into the confusion into which Russia had been plunged since the March revolution.

There was still the consolation, of course, that, however bad things were, they were only a dream and that the relief of awakening to ordinary sane life again could not long be delayed, but whereas a few weeks ago the dreamers had been convinced that the dream

would pass quickly of its own accord, now they were becoming wildly afraid that quite terrible things might happen to them as individuals before this collective dream passed, and to speculate frantically on the possibility of something coming to drive the nightmare away from outside.

The natural hope of everybody was the Allies, who surely could not permit the Germans to be freed of the burden of war on a whole long front, and who, apart from the war altogether, since they were also Christian peoples and owners of money, land, workshops, and banks, drawers of rents and users of labour, surely could not stand idly by and see their fellows in Russia despoiled by workmen and peasants whom anti-Christ had turned into ravening wolves. But was anybody doing anything? Did they know what was happening and how urgently their intervention was required? As far as could be gathered from the Press, which the Bolsheviks had not yet sought to control, and the news Rak could give us of what was going on among the Bolsheviks themselves, the Allies seemed to be curiously unaware of the situation that had developed in Russia or to be wholly indifferent about Russia as a war ally any more.

Rak's opinion was that the outside world was in the same position as we had been a few weeks before. They viewed the Bolsheviks with their appeals to the workers of the world to unite as an absurd and impossible manifestation which could not last, and were ignorant of our terror that they would last a sight too long. As for the Bolsheviks themselves, they were unable to believe that they were being left alone and were as jumpy as cats about the plots for counter-revolution and intervention which they were convinced must be being prepared behind their backs.

But the cries of those who were being despoiled or feared despoliation were mounting to the skies, and something must be done. It was decided to try to form a new secret counter-revolutionary organization based on the former Military League and to get in touch with representatives of the Allies who were still in Petrograd to persuade them to send forces to Russia which could provide a rallying-point for all the opposition elements who were at the moment scattered everywhere and driven underground. The difficulty was to make contact with these Allied representations, for they were taking the greatest care to keep themselves free from any entanglements which might make their relations with the Bolshevik government more strained than they already were.

We decided, however, that before we began in earnest, a rather unpleasant task which we had been shirking for the past few weeks would now have to be performed. This was to tell Madame K—— that she must move out of my flat. During the period between the

July rising and October, the former Tsar's Flying Corps at Tsarskoe Selo had to all intents and purposes disbanded itself and K——, who had never had much taste for army duties, had taken advantage of the general disorder to take French leave from the army and slip off south, ostensibly to take over some property to which his wife had recently fallen heir, but actually to get as far away as possible from the unpleasantnesses of revolution and war.

His wife had refused to accompany him on the plea that traveling conditions were unsuitable for a woman and a small child, actually because she was no longer in love with her husband and could not endure the prospect of living alone with him on a small country estate. So it had been arranged that she and the child could continue to occupy their rooms in my flat, and the arrangement had served well enough until the Bolsheviks upset everything. It had been impossible to keep our work secret from Madame K——, and we had not worried much about her knowing of it because she had more reason to be anti-Bolshevik than we. Family estates from which she derived her income had been seized by the local peasant Soviet and the manager driven to take refuge in Moscow. The closing of the banks in Petrograd and the stoppage of her allowance as an officer's wife had left her in a precarious position. Naturally, while we had resources she and her child would not starve, but the difficulty of her circumstances had produced in her a neurotic condition which was very trying for Vidiakin and myself—especially for me, for she was seeking a comfort from me which I was not prepared to give.

I had a number of very good reasons for not giving way to Madame K——'s very openly expressed desires that I should lighten her troubles with the consolations of love. For one thing, K—— was my friend, and for another, in the work we were doing an entanglement of this kind was better avoided. Perhaps if I had liked her very much these obstacles might not have stood in the way, but although she was young, beautiful, and accomplished, she was not a type which I found very attractive, and my heart was already engaged. I was in love with Natasha, the dark masseuse whom I had first met when I called on Mademoiselle Berdicheva.

Since that first meeting I had seen her in all a dozen times and for never more than an hour, swift stolen meetings in which she had at first been withdrawn and shy. She was a Roman Catholic and lived with a tiny hidden sisterhood of nuns to whose care she had been committed as a little girl of eight when her father, an officer in the artillery, had left to take part in the Russo-Japanese War. Her mother, an actress, was already dead. Her father had made provision for her to be adopted by the nuns should he be

killed, and when he died in the siege of Port Arthur they took her definitely under their care. Her father had stipulated, however, that she was not to be allowed to enter the novitiate or to be persuaded to do so until she had first been given some experience of the world, and it was in accordance with this wish that the nuns had sought an occupation for her, and through Berdicheva, who had known her mother, she had been apprenticed as a masseuse.

It was a sweet, shy Natasha I found when I had persuaded her that there were less terrifying fish in the sea than figured in the cloister tales of the land-lubber nuns. But the combined disciplines of the convent and her job and the demands of my double duties at Tsarskoe Selo and for the Counter-Espionage had made meetings difficult before the revolution, plus a strange reluctance in Natasha herself which was difficult to understand and impossible to overcome. Her love for me seemed to be satisfied with thinking of me, which she swore she never ceased to do, and though she was infinitely tender with me in our later meetings, pledging herself again and again to me with long caresses, she was always composed and ready for parting and would never promise a quick reunion, as though our being together meant no more to her than a reassurance of my actual existence, a recharging of her imagination, and when she had touched and kissed and looked her fill of me, all she wanted to do was to hurry away with this new cargo of me into her dreams.

Shortly before the Bolshevik outbreak in July she had accompanied the Mother Superior of the little convent on a visit to some relations of the latter's among the German Catholics of the Crimea, a visit which had protracted itself through the summer and autumn and was to have concluded in the very week the Bolsheviks rose. Since when I had heard nothing of her at all. A queer love-affair, perhaps, but its bitter-sweetness, its hopes and frustrations, for all their horrid insubstantiality, were the one constant star that shone in my sky in these days, and I was young and determined to be true.

For that reason I had been trying to pluck up courage for nearly a month to suggest to Madame K—— that she should go, but it was certain she would raise a vigorous howl against being thrust out at this particular time, even though we had friends who would have been willing to take her in, so the deed had been postponed and postponed. All suggestions that she might join her husband were rejected with contempt. But my flat was the most convenient centre for the new activities and therefore she must be asked to leave at once. We should probably need the space she was occupying for men whom it was necessary to hide for a few days, and in any case we could not afford to have a woman of her type mixed up in this

work. When she had gone, too, we could get rid of the maid. The cook, a really trustworthy old soul, we intended to retain. New accommodation was secured for her, and a few nights before Christmas Eve I went into her room to tell her, with Vlassieff standing by in my own room in case of a scene. The excuse I had prepared was that we had reason to suspect that Smolny was not unaware of our work for the cadets and that we considered she should transfer to some safe place in case there should be a raid. Her reaction was the opposite of what I had hoped for. She threw her arms round my neck and implored me either to fly with her to escape the danger or to permit her to stay and share it too.

When I had disengaged myself from the embrace I argued as gently and sympathetically as I could that it was her duty to go away in the interests of her child. But this merely precipitated another flood of tears. In this terrible world we were living in, what was to become of her and her child when I, her only friend, wanted to cast her out and leave her to fend for herself? I repeated that she was not being cast out, that we should continue to look after her and provide her with money, only we thought she would be safer elsewhere.

"Then you are not expecting to go to prison?" she asked, her tears stopping in an instant and suspicion glittering in her eyes.

This was a facer. Stoutly I protested that we were running a real risk now that the Cheka was in operation.

"Then if you are arrested we shall be alone, wherever we are, my baby and I!"

I assured her that even if we were arrested our friends with whom she was going to live would not let her starve.

She wailed again. "It's not only money and food we need, it's protection and love."

What a curse the woman was! I lost patience with her entirely.

"Then if it's protection and love you want, why don't you go to your husband and ask him for it? Surely you don't think you've got a claim for these things on me?"

It was a foolish thing to say, but I was nervous and embarrassed beyond endurance. She was up like a tiger in a flash, drumming her fists on my chest until I seized her wrists in self-protection.

"I hate my husband. I wouldn't go back to him if he was the last man on earth. And I hate you! I hate you! You want to send me back to him, but I won't go. Leave me alone! I'll do what you want. I'll get out of here and take my child with me, and I'll go straight to Smolny and tell the Bolsheviki everything I know. You will go to prison because I'll send you there. And then I'll throw myself and my child in the river. I swear it! I'll do everything I say!"

She jerked herself free and dropped on the floor, screaming with hysterical rage. The situation was beyond me. I shut the door to keep in her screams and went for Vlassieff. He went in to her alone. It was a long time before he returned.

"It's all right," he said. "I've put the fear of God into her and she'll go."

She insisted on packing the same evening and went to the friends with whom we had arranged for her to live, taking the child with her.

She had hardly been gone an hour when there was a knock at the door. It was K—— himself. He was dressed in a dirty old peasant's coat and fur hat and had a fortnight's growth of beard. He was ravenous. A horde of peasants, infuriated by some scathing remarks which he had made in response to their demand that he should surrender to them the few hectares of land surrounding his house, had burned the place down and he had barely escaped with his life. He had been a month on the road. We fed him, gave him clean clothes, and suggested he might like to follow his wife, but he demurred and admitted frankly that he was no more anxious to be with her than she was to be with him. He really seemed rather relieved to find she had gone. After he had eaten he showed himself the same old irrepressible K—— and, discovering a mandolin he had left behind him, insisted on paying for his supper with a song.

We were a little embarrassed by this sudden reappearance, for although he was a good fellow and we liked him, he was hardly the type whom we were anxious to involve in our new schemes. Nevertheless we told him of the assistance we were giving to the cadets and offered to smuggle him to the north. It was decided that he should remain with us over Christmas, but Vlassieff insisted that he should pay a call next day on his wife. If she still had any ideas of going to Smolny, Vlassieff privately explained to me, the knowledge that her husband was living with us might have a restraining effect. However much she disliked him, she could hardly wish to see him in a Bolshevik prison.

Next morning K—— paid his duty call. The same afternoon Madame K—— went to the Bolshevik headquarters at the Smolny Institute and told them everything she knew.

CHAPTER III

IN THE HANDS OF THE CHEKA

My career as a Scarlet Pimpernel of Petrograd ended on the night of December 23, 1917. I had been out on a foray, and it was well after six o'clock when I arrived back at the flat in Tavritcheskaya Street. Although it was so close to Christmas the streets were practically deserted. Here and there bands of armed "leather jackets" floundered hurriedly along on some errand in the knee-deep snow, but the few private citizens who were out of doors slunk along as I did, making themselves as inconspicuous as possible, hands deep in pockets, eyes and ears cocking nervously around and ahead for any suggestion that we were coming uncomfortably close to the cradle of those stray rifle-shots which seemed unable to leave the clear cold air undisturbed for more than a minute.

Earlier in the day the streets had been livelier. There was little Christmas shopping being done, of course, but the dispossessed and those who feared dispossession were seeking the churches in large numbers, not to rejoice this year over the birth of the Saviour, but to make the utmost of a period when the hearing of the saints and powers of heaven might be supposed to be specially sensitive. There was even whispered talk of a projected heavenly intervention. A Roman Catholic priest was supposed to be in the know and had promised short shrift for Lenin, Trotsky, and the whole gang of Red guards and commissars. Most of the male *bourgeoisie* would have preferred to place their salvation in the homelier hands of the Allies or the Germans, but in the circumstances they were ready to clutch at any straws, even those they found in their womenfolks' hair, and though members of the Orthodox Church were inclined to be sceptical of an intervention vouchsafed to a Roman Catholic, so much had happened recently that was entirely against all order and precedent that none of them felt any confidence in being contemptuous even about that.

There were distinct possibilities for the Pimpernel business in this Christmas season, however, and it was with a view to making full use of them that I had been out that day. Religion had not yet become the opium of the Russian people, but even if it had, no Soviet ukase could have done anything to stop the proletariat from celebrating the first Christmas of the revolution in time-honoured

fashion. There were still wine-cellars to be rifled. There were plenty of fine houses in which to hold carousals, and what better way could new lords of creation find of rejoicing in their lordship than by staging Christmas drunks in the halls where the lords of privilege had got so gloriously drunk for so many years before? So were arguing the hooligans of the revolution, and we knew that once they had begun there was every chance of practically every Red guard and soldier in Petrograd joining in and thereby giving us the freedom of the city for so long as the supply of wine-cellars lasted. We were determined to make the utmost use of the opportunity and arrangements had been made for a first batch of eleven cadets to be smuggled out of town next evening. I had been round them all delivering the warnings. Vidiakin was to have the passports ready on my return and the morning and afternoon of the next day were to be spent in discovering just how far our hopes of Christmas relaxation among the soldiers were to be gratified. On these reports the escape routes would depend.

I was tired and wet. My nerves were a bit on edge after the day's dodging, and every time a nervous sentry or idle enthusiast let off his rifle, I jumped. I was beginning to feel the strain. I found myself thinking I would be the better of a holiday for a few days and laughed. There was a world war still on and Russia was heaving as in an earthquake all the way from here to Vladivostok, and I was dreaming about holidays. I couldn't even get down to the rest billets for a few days. There was still some good champagne in the flat. After Christmas the three of us would have a "blind". That would be our holiday. I longed for Natasha.

When I reached the flat, however, my pessimistic mood soon went. Eber had come in and they were all drinking tea. K—— was in his usual good humour and was making Eber roar with laughter with his descriptions of the doings at the Flying Corps mess. Eber stayed with us, chatting and laughing, until eleven, when he went upstairs to his own flat taking the forged passports for the eleven cadets with him. It had been arranged that he would distribute them next day just in case I might have attracted on my rounds some unfriendly neighbour's attention. We knocked out our pipes and vent to our bedrooms.

I always kept a volume of Kipling beside my bed, and I was trying to fix my attention on the adventures of Rikitikitavy, the mongoose, when Roy, the wolf-hound who was asleep at the foot of my bed, started up with a growl. I heard a door bang and then the maid's voice outside in the corridor :

"Come quick, sir, come quick ! There are burglars at the back door !"

Burglar bands were a common feature of Petrograd life in those days, so I was not unduly disturbed. Slipping on a dressing-gown, I put my pistol in my pocket and hurried out into the corridor. K—— and Vidiakin appeared at their doors simultaneously and the three of us rushed along the passage into the kitchen where our cook was cowering in abject terror in a corner watching the back door rattle on its hinges. Roy dashed past us, and putting his fore-paws up on the straining door, barked loudly. The rattling ceased.

Determined to teach this intruder a lesson, I signed to Vidiakin to put out the light. With my revolver ready in my hand, I threw the door wide open. In the dim light of the staircase I saw a man with a rifle in his hand. But before I had time to speak or move, Roy leapt from the middle of the kitchen floor clean on to the fellow's chest and dog and man went tumbling down the steps. There was a scrambling and snarling on the next landing and we heard heavy footsteps running down the stairs. Switching on the light, I called to Roy to come back. The wolf-hound looked up but apparently relished the chase better than obedience, for with a loud bark he shot down the stairs after the fugitive. I was about to dash after him when the maid stopped me with a cry that somebody was trying to break in the front door.

As we hurried back to the hall I pressed the alarm bell which would summon our neighbours. We held a whispered consultation. A tremendous rattling and banging was being made upon the front door. We formed a plan. Vidiakin stood beside the door with a poker. I stood in the centre of the hall with my revolver. K—— pulled the door open and jumped behind it.

The man on the other side must have been just about to hurl himself against it to burst it open with his shoulders, for when the door flew open he staggered right into the room. He stopped just in front of me and before he could recover his balance I gave him a savage upper-cut full under the jaw. He dropped at my feet.

"Hands up !" shouted a voice. Two other men appeared in the open door-way. One of them was levelling a rifle at me. I put my hand above my head and moved back a step.

"Stop where you are !" he shouted. Pretending to be afraid of him I fell back another two steps. As I had hoped he followed, and Vidiakin's poker descended on his head. His rifle dropped with a clatter and he followed it to the floor. His companion gave a loud yell and ran for his life.

Kicking the man with the broken head farther into the room K—— whooped with delight and closed and locked the door. We were so delighted with our victory that we could hardly contain ourselves but ran round the room slapping one another on the

back and laughing and shouting with glee over my upper-cut and Vidiakin's poker-stroke. After all those weeks of suppression it was sheer joy to have had a whack at somebody, to have given ourselves over gloriously to physical violence and found an outlet in a well-delivered blow for so much fear. In downing these two bandits we felt as gleeful as if we had overthrown the whole revolution.

"God, what a pity they're not the Cheka !" roared K——, dancing a jig round the unconscious head of the fellow whose chin I had so viciously handled.

I was just thinking it was about time we carried our victims down to the street before they recovered, when there was another knocking outside and I heard Eber's voice calling me loudly. In the excitement of the moment I had forgotten I had rung the alarm bell. Here were our neighbours answering the summons and we had something grand to show them. I opened the door.

K—— was plucking out a song of triumph from his mandolin.

"Come in, come in ! See what we have done !" shouted Vidiakin.

I put my foot on the fallen robber's chest. "Come in and see who killed Cock Robin !" I called. "Behold our vanquished burglar band."

Eber had stopped in the door-way. His face was white. He gulped and could hardly speak. He stared at the bodies on the floor and began to tremble. Then he shut the door swiftly behind him.

"For God's sake shut up, you fools !" he whispered hoarsely ; "these aren't burglars you've been knocking about, they're the Cheka !"

"The Cheka !"

The stricken silence that followed our first outburst seemed to last ages. Vidiakin looked mutely at me and I at the shivering Eber. It was broken by a sharp ping from K——'s mandolin. A string had snapped. The poor fellow looked at it as if it had spoken to him and in one stride reached and opened the door of my big hall-cupboard. He pushed the instrument in and shut the door firmly again. Then he let out a deep breath as if that incriminating witness of his misdeeds had been well disposed of. He was so serious I had to laugh, and that released our energies.

"What in hell can we do ?" It was the anxious Vidiakin asking.

"There's a lorry at the street door. It's full of them." Eber at the window was jumping up and down in his excitement.

"Let's barricade ourselves in." K—— was all determination now that silly mandolin was out of the way.

I considered.

"You'd better get out of here, Eber. Get upstairs at once and keep quiet. Put these bodies out on the landing. We'll tell the truth,

that we thought they were robbers. Catherine and Olga can bear us out in that."

The cook and the maid had run back along the passage to the kitchen and were standing with their arms tight round one another in mortal terror.

"Whatever we do," I continued, "Eber must keep out of this. You know the plans for tomorrow, Eber. Do your best for those boys if we're not with you. Besides, if they arrest us we'll need somebody outside. Let Eber go and then we'll decide."

Eber shook hands with us, wished us luck, and stepped out again. The telephone rang. It was the chairman of our house-committee. A representative of the Cheka was with him. They had a warrant to search my flat and wished to come up. This was a different tune from their last attempt to enter. Perhaps we had not done so badly for ourselves.

"Tell him to come up at once," I said.

There was a polite knock at the door and the Cheka official entered. He was a sour-looking individual and was followed by four heavily armed soldiers. From his accent I could tell he was an Esthonian. He produced an official warrant signed by Peters, the second-in-command of the Cheka. I began my apology and explanation, indicating the unconscious bodies still lying on the hall floor. He cut me short with an impatient gesture.

"Make your complaint in the proper quarter," he grunted.

Two of the soldiers thereupon carried out their companions while the other two remained to guard us. By this time, of course, the whole of our building was awake, and this being the first Cheka search that had taken place in our block there was intense excitement among the occupants, and they crowded the stairs and door and some even ventured into the apartment to see what was happening.

Of the seven rooms only one contained anything incriminating. These were the fake passports and other documents I have already mentioned and they were in a couple of cases in a small box-room in the servants' quarters. If they were found, of course, the fat was in the fire. I had no idea how to divert the attention of the Cheka searchers from them. I merely had to wait and see what happened.

The hall cupboard was opened. Hats and coats were pulled out and K——'s mandolin. I turned round to smile at him, but he had vanished. The first door led to the dining-room and here the attack concentrated on the sideboard. There were the usual crockery, glasses and cutlery, and a dozen bottles of champagne and three bottles of whisky. All other articles were thrown on the floor, but when the Esthonian lifted out the bottles of liquor he placed them

carefully on the dining-table. As he did so he mumbled something about confiscation.

I saw the two soldiers look at each other and one of them began a long grumbling.

"See here, comrade searcher, we've had enough of these confiscations. Who confiscated this wine? Is it you or is it the people? Because if it's the people, that's us; and what's to prevent the people confiscating this wine right here on the spot and getting the benefit of some of these confiscations? For if all we do is to confiscate and all we are to see of our confiscation is the wine disappearing into the rooms of the Commissars and the empty bottles coming out again, what benefit do we common folk get out of this confiscation?"

His companions growled agreement with this claim of rights.

The Cheka searcher frowned and squared his shoulders aggressively.

"The revolution was made for other things than to provide free wine," he announced sententiously.

"Then why do we confiscate it?" demanded the soldier.

"Because it is a property of the rich and all property belongs to the people," replied the searcher.

"If it belongs to the people, then I say the people should enjoy it," returned the soldier, but it was evident that if the searcher could provide another answer the argument would go beyond the soldier's depth and the opportunity I saw looming up would pass irretrievably. Signing to Vidiakin to close the door on the crowd in the hall, I stepped forward.

"Excuse me, but if there is any doubt about whether my wine should be confiscated or not, would it not be the best way out of the difficulty if I made a present of it to the people—and especially"—smiling insinuatingly here—"to those representatives of the people who are with me now?"

I tried to address my remarks just a little more in the direction of the soldiers than the Cheka official, though I was careful to include him within my gaze. The soldiers waited for the Cheka man to reply. He looked from me to the wine as if the bottles themselves might suggest the solution for this unusual situation. I saw I had to keep my lead.

"After all, comrade citizen," I continued with a smile, "until the question of confiscation is decided the wine is legally mine and"—I picked up one of the bottles of champagne, knocked off the neck on the stove, and began pouring the contents into the glasses which the searcher had obligingly laid out in readiness on top of the sideboard—"I trust you will not insult me by refusing to drink my wine in my own house if I give you the toast of—the people of Russia?"

While I was talking I had handed brimming glasses to the soldiers and now I offered one to the still confused official.

"Drink, Commissar, to the people of Russia. May they never again feel the heel of masters who drink wine while the workers and peasants are thirsty and unfed!"

"Hear, hear!" roared the soldiers in unison and hurriedly drained off their glasses, their eyes goggling at the sight of the bubbling liquid and fearful that something might happen even now to prevent this so much-prized wine which they were holding in their hands from actually entering their mouths. The Cheka official looked rather sheepish, but probably he saw no more of confiscated wine than did the soldiers and was merely obeying instructions in reserving any which he discovered. Anyhow, with a muttered, "The people!" he also tossed off the glass and the strict routine of the search had been temporarily suspended.

But the crack in the searchers' efficiency had to be widened till it let through a gushing tide if it was to be of any real use to us. So I filled up glasses for them again and also for Vidiakin and myself. We were about to drink another ambiguous toast which I thought up on the spur of the moment when the door was thrown open and in walked two more Cheka officials and four more soldiers. There was an anxious moment of confusion on both sides.

I was just about to break the tension by lurching at the starers with a loud whoop and an outstretched glass when the foremost of them rapped out:

"What's that? Champagne?" And stepping to the table, filled himself out a glass and gave it an appreciative sip. He rolled his eyes with mock delight at which we all laughed. Next moment they were all at the table snatching at glasses and bottles.

I wished K—— had been with us to help to keep the pot boiling, but he seemed to have disappeared. I wondered if he had made a getaway. There was no need for me to fill the glasses. I had only to keep some argument going to keep their minds off the business which had brought them, and so long as the talk flowed I was sure the drink would.

While they drank and laughed I had an opportunity to study these representatives of the new order. As were most of the soldiers employed on Cheka business at that time, the soldiers were either Letts or Finns. They had the reputation of being mercenary desperadoes, ready for any job that offered an opportunity for loot and the exercise of an innate coarse recklessness and brutality. They had nothing of the Slav soul in them. Immune from temperament, they were more reliable for this work than the average Russian, whose imagination laid him much more open to appeals either to his

mercy or what he considered his reason if he had had any sort of education, and being subject peoples of the Tsardom they were naturally disposed to the support of those who had accomplished its overthrow. They had nothing against me at this moment and laughed heartily at any joke I made with them.

The Cheka men proper were a different type. There was the Esthonian, of course, grim and sullen. He had a sense of humour all right, but when he did laugh he resumed his sourness so quickly and shamefacedly that he seemed to be afraid someone would reprimand him for it. Obviously a conscience was at work in him.

The man who had entered the room first of the second group presented no difficulties. He was telling his own story. Half Italian, half Russian, he was as open and free as the Esthonian was dark. His father had been a Kropotkin anarchist involved in the 1905 troubles and had emigrated to America, taking his son with him. Bell-hop, ship steward, vaudeville entertainer, the son had never lost contact with Socialist and Communist activities. He had returned to seek a new Russia when the Tsar abdicated in the belief that his father would have desired it. He knew all about the aims and objects of the revolution but he saw no reason why he should not enjoy himself. Lively and talkative in four languages, he was in the Cheka because he was supposed to have a special knowledge of the wiles of the *bourgeoisie*. He winked at me when he said this. But he shouldn't have mixed champagne and whisky.

The third man was a stupid fish. He alternated between spells of oafish grinning at the bell-hop and bouts of abstracted frowning at me. I couldn't make anything of him.

The Esthonian was the most abstemious among them. His was the only glass I had to attend to. There was still some wine untouched when he insisted on continuing the search. The others declined to go with him. I made up my mind what I should do. If he insisted on searching the box-room I would shoot down the Esthonian, and Vidiakin and I could make a bolt for it down the back stairs. At last he had finished with all but the servants' quarters and had made a pile of papers and letters which he intended taking away with him. But I had nothing to be nervous about in that collection.

He turned along the servants' lobby and put his hand on the box-room door handle. The door was locked.

"What is this room?" he asked.

"Only old clothes and the servants' boxes, I expect," I answered as casually as I could.

"Open it," he commanded.

My hand in my pocket gripped my revolver.

"Open this door!" repeated the Esthonian curtly. "I've spent enough time here."

The revolver was half out of my pocket when somebody pushed past me with a quiet, "Excuse me, sir." It was K—— in his shirt-sleeves and his middle draped with a butler's green-baize apron. He had a key in his hand and opened the box-room door with it.

"As you see, the little room is quite empty," he said to the Esthonian. Then turning to me without a smile, "I cleaned it out myself, sir, a few days ago. I hope you don't mind, sir. I thought I might be allowed to use it for practising my music."

The Esthonian walked in and I followed him. It was true. The room was absolutely bare.

"Forgive me," murmured K—— to the Esthonian, "but I play the mandolin."

"*Ach!*" The Esthonian pushed him aside contemptuously and stopped at the next door. "What's in here?"

"Only the kitchen and the maid's bedroom. The cook—my wife—and I sleep out," murmured K——.

"We are only concerned with the *bourgeoisie*," growled the Esthonian and turned back along the narrow corridor. He made a short report on my telephone to his headquarters stating that he was bringing back a number of papers with him. Vidiakin and I helped him to round up the other members of his crew and they left us.

It was three o'clock in the morning. We were not in the least jubilant, not even K——, who might have had some cause to be. While we were drinking in the dining-room he had collected all the incriminating papers into an old trunk and passed it on the end of a rope through the window up to Eber. But the excitement of the last hours had tried our nerves and the chaos left all over the flat where everything had been turned out by the zealous Esthonian on to the floors was hardly cheering. Still, thanks to the wine and K——'s wits, we had escaped the worst—for the moment, at least. We decided to have some tea.

Three special taps on the door signalled Eber. He had crept down to find out what had happened. While the four of us sat drinking the tea we discussed the possibilities. There was of course the broken head of Vidiakin's soldier. My casualty should have recovered before now. There was the presence of Vidiakin to be accounted for and the fact that I had acquired a previously non-existent butler might be looked into but only if inquiries regarding us were made among the servants or the neighbours. They had taken all my personal papers, including a considerable quantity of correspondence. It was inevitable that they should learn from these that I was of

British origin. They could also learn a little, not much, of the positions I had held under the two previous governments. These might rouse some suspicions. The question was—should we try to escape at once or would that be dangerous? Perhaps we were being watched at this moment. The Esthonian was stronger-headed than the others. He had not succumbed to our hospitality and might even be bearing a grudge because of it. I opened the window and looked down into the street. The fresh frosty air outside blew into the stuffy room. In the distance I heard the sound of a motor-car engine. Two cars came slowly down the street and stopped outside our house door.

"They're here again," I whispered.

Hastily Eber crept upstairs again. We waited in silence. I suddenly remembered K——'s green apron and his pose as a butler. But he refused to go on with it.

"Maybe I'm going out of this room to be shot," he smiled wanly. "I couldn't be shot dressed as a butler. What's the use? They'd know who I was in three questions."

Vidiakin grunted his approval of this stand. We waited again. After an intolerable interval a light rat-tat sounded on the flat door. I opened it to admit a new file of Red soldiers, new faces every one of them. I pretended surprise.

"What, you back again?" I said. "Your comrades left here about an hour ago."

"We know," replied the leader, "but we have a warrant for your arrest and the arrest of all dangerous individuals living in this house."

"But why?" I protested. "And who, if I may ask, are these dangerous individuals?"

The soldier spat.

"All you *bourgeoisie* are dangerous to us. I'll arrest the lot of you and the clever fellows at Cheka headquarters can sift you out for themselves. They've got a better nose for your smells."

We were certainly becoming acquainted with many types of the revolutionary soldier in the course of one morning. We were permitted to complete our dressing. The cook and the maid were brought in and told to remain in the flat all day in case they were wanted. The cook, through her tears, had the courage to protest against the whole revolution to the soldiers. I expected an explosion, perhaps violence.

"Get off to your bed, old lard-bladder," he growled, and spat on the floor again.

With a Red soldier before and behind each of us, Vidiakin, K——, and I walked down the stairs into Tavritcheskaya Street. The only sounds as we crossed the pavement to the waiting cars were some of those ominous stray rifle-shots still continuing.

CHAPTER IV

WILD-WEST ANTICS WITH A CHEKA INQUISITOR

THE headquarters of the Cheka had been established in the former offices of the Secret Police in Gorokhovaya Street, not far from Rasputin's old flat. As the car jolted and bumped its way down the street I glanced up at the windows of the flat, but they were dark. Our reception at the Cheka was routine. Another Lett, a sleepy individual in an officer's tunic without epaulets and speaking horribly broken Russian, asked our names and registered them in a book. I was surprised that we were not searched as I still had my revolver, fully loaded, in my pocket.

We were led up to the second story of the building and shown into a room. I don't know how many other rooms there were in the building or how many people had to find accommodation in it on that particular morning. The whole place may have been crowded to overflowing or it may have been calculated Cheka procedure to cram twenty-seven people into a room twenty-three paces long by eleven paces wide. On the other hand, it may have been just the brute stupidity and indifference of the Lett guards who, having been told to put newly received prisoners in a certain room, would go on putting every arrival in there until the sheer impossibility of forcing another inside the door would suggest to them that it would be necessary to seek instructions. Things like that happen with peasant mentalities. Anyhow, these were the dimensions of the room we were put into (I measured them myself later in the day), and there were already twenty-four people in it, twenty men and four women.

They were all asleep. Our entry did not disturb them. Two of them slouched like dead things on two wooden chairs, the rest were lying in closely packed rows on the floor. Pushed just inside the door, we stopped where we were and gasped. It was impossible to move a step farther without treading on a sleeping bundle. An electric lamp hung from the ceiling. Someone had tried to reduce the glare by wrapping it in newspaper. The newsprint made fantastic patterns on the upturned faces and the bare walls. The hot sweating air was a solid wall of greasy smell. Even if there had been room to move on the floor we must have pulled up dead when our faces hit

this foul warmth which had been breathed in and out so often by so many bodies that it was compressed so thick as to be seen. We stood like men halted in dismay on the threshold of a chamber filled with heavy gas. We would have believed the bodies at our feet were all dead if their combined breathing had not crashed on our ears in a never-ending, choking, snorting, sobbing snore.

In the centre of the room was a small table, not large enough for one to sleep on, but good enough for three men to rest their backsides against, and if they put their shoulders together they could all have support. Balancing on one toe and scraping a space between two bodies with the other, we reached the table and took up positions. We decided to smoke. It could scarcely make the air worse and it might be some protection against infection.

From my position against the table I could see through the window. Condensed breath was running down the glass in rivulets which had cleared a track here and there and through one of these I could make out the name "Kune & Co." on the sign of a shop opposite which was lit up by the light from our window. I had often bought things at this shop and knew the manager very well. He lived in a flat over the shop and had occasionally given information to the Counter-Espionage. Perhaps I could get a message sent to him. I wanted to get in touch with Vlassieff. Then Vidiakin drew my attention to something quite astonishing. There was a telephone on the wall.

We discussed in whispers. Perhaps it was there because it was disconnected and nobody had bothered to remove it. Perhaps it was there in the hope that some desperate suspect would use it and give himself or someone else away. I was inclined to think the real explanation was neither of them. The experiences of the night had lowered my opinion of the Cheka organization. Some clever men they must undoubtedly have; some conscientious men like the Esthonian. But much must be left to the rank and file, and we had seen that these were a mixture of peasants and ruffians. The peasants were stupid and the ruffians were careless. Both merely carried out orders. If the telephone had been overlooked by their harassed superiors, it was unlikely that any of the boors we had seen around would do anything about it. Why not investigate?

We made a plan. First, K—— acrobated to the door and knocked. It was opened by the guard. K—— declared he was dying of thirst—could the guard get him a drink? The guard at first refused, but after some wheedling agreed to try. The door was closed and relocked. In the corner was a pile of overcoats and fur mantles where our fellow suspects, not requiring them for sleeping coverings owing to the heat of the room, had thrown them down. Vidiakin

danced through the bodies and returned with three or four of those to the telephone at which I had now taken my station. I got close to the mouthpiece and he covered me over with the coats and leaned up against me. Stuffing my handkerchief between the signal bells I put the receiver to my ear and listened. To those with experience of the Petrograd telephone system it is not difficult to tell whether the line is being listened to or not. As soon as I lifted the receiver I knew I had a direct line to the City Exchange. After a few seconds a girl's voice answered.

"Number, please?"

"Engineer speaking," I replied. "I am doing some repairs to the line here. When I replace the receiver will you call me back?"

In a second the muffled ring came back. I asked the girl a few questions about audibility and instructed her to put me through to Vlassieff's number. He answered. Quickly I told him of my arrest and gave him the message I wanted him to have. Then I hung up. We were all in our places at the table when the guard came back to tell K—— he would have to wait till breakfast for his drink of water.

Grey December light was creeping across the window and snow falling outside when our twenty-four room-mates began to stir themselves and wake up. One by one the sleepy, sallow, dirty faces emerged from the groups on the floor. Some had been arrested for sabotage, refusal in various ways to co-operate with the new regime. Others were accused of offences of hoarding or speculation. This seemed to be the most common offence. Most of them were rather undesirable types, back-street pawnbrokers and money-lenders, old-clothes dealers, cheap boarding-house keepers, people who lined their pockets well in the old days while living in semi-squalor and probably had many enemies who were eager to inform on them. Dog could eat dog under this Red mandate.

We had scarcely finished breakfast—an unpleasant swill—when the guard opened the door and our names were called. In the passage outside were six men in leather jackets and breeches. Some had cutlasses and all had revolvers. Vidiakin and K—— were marched off in one direction and I in the other.

The former police headquarters in Gorochovaya Street was a rambling building and I was led by my two guards through corridors, along a dark passage, across several empty and ransacked rooms, and up a narrow winding staircase before we stopped at a door on which was printed in rough characters "Chief Inspector and Comrade Poloukaroff". My cutlass-bearing guard knocked and we entered. A small man in black-rimmed spectacles and American-cut clothes sat at a desk. He nodded to me and indicated a chair.

"My name is Model. I am the Chief Investigator. Sit down."

In a rather perfunctory way he asked me a number of personal questions—my name, address, age, and so on. It was obvious that he had the answers already and was regarding me rather than my replies to his questions. Suddenly he leaned forward and placed a sheet of paper and pencil before me.

"Write down the full particulars of your case, will you?"

I looked at him.

"What particulars of what case?"

He tapped the desk impatiently.

"Surely you know why you have been arrested?"

I looked blank.

"No, I don't know, but I should like to have you tell me."

He took off his spectacles.

"I am surprised that you think it necessary to go on pretending, Citizen. You know what it is all about. You must know that we know all about you and your various activities. We know that you are an agent of the British Government, and I may say that when we searched your flat last night we discovered several, I repeat several, very incriminating documents showing that you are not in favour of the Workers' and Peasants' Government."

"Indeed."

"Yes. I can assure you your position is serious. Naturally, you will be given every chance to explain yourself. In fact, Comrade Dzerjinsky himself will see you and would like you to answer a few questions."

"Yes, Comrade Investigator?"

"Now it would make everything very much quicker and easier if you would just give us your own frank statement of what you have been doing and your explanation of why you did it."

He pointed again to the pencil and paper.

I drew the paper towards me and took up the pencil. Model left the room. Very slowly I wrote the date, my name, and address. Addressing the statement to the chief of the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Sabotage and Counter-Revolution, I declared that my arrest was totally unjustified and demanded to be released immediately.

The two guards in the room were smoking that foul Russian tobacco known as "machorka". Machorka is an ideal remedy for bugs and cockroaches, but I have never been able to live in the same room with it. They accepted my cigarettes in exchange but would not talk. They had been told to regard me as a "specially dangerous prisoner". After about a quarter of an hour Model returned. I handed him my statement. He glanced at it.

"So," he grunted, evidently not particularly disappointed.

"Very well, Comrade Dzerjinsky will see you himself shortly. Take him across the passage."

I was shown into a tiny box-room lit by a paraffin lamp swinging from the ceiling. I was given a chair. One of the guards sat on another chair by the door, a revolver ready on his knee. Neither of us spoke. I wondered what was happening to Vidiakin and K——. I smoked several cigarettes before a voice called something outside. My guard rose and said : "Come."

This time I found myself in a large room, the full size of which was not at first visible because it was in darkness but for a small space around a huge writing-desk on which stood two lighted candles. The guard motioned me to sit down beside the desk and took his stance by the door. For fully another fifteen minutes I sat in silence. As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness I examined the furnishings of the room. As far as I could see, the walls were hung all round with heavy black curtains. The floor was covered with a black carpet of deep pile into which the foot sank. The ceiling was painted black and there was no window. The desk was also of some dark wood and was unrelieved by any papers or ornaments except for the candlesticks, which were of black crystal. At first sight the candles appeared to be floating in mid-air. Their flames burned straight up with hardly a flicker. The guard was outside the range of the light. But I knew he was standing there, mute, immovable, for all the world as if some solemn watch were being kept for a dead person.

The atmosphere was not oppressive. It was not mysterious. It was just—well, final is the word that comes into my mind. It induced in me a positively mortuary feeling. There was a dead man in this room for whom these walls were draped in black and these candles were solemnly burning, and that dead man, presumably, was me. I rose to my feet intending to pace up and down.

"Sit down !" barked the guard out of the darkness. I slumped back on to the chair.

I wondered whether Dzerjinsky had created this room for himself or whether it was something he had taken on from the machinery of the Tsarist police.

After an age a door behind the desk opened.

The figure that appeared in the gap silhouetted against the light from the room behind was tall and lean. After observing me for a few seconds it sauntered noiselessly to the desk and remained standing just within the candlelight. I saw strong, spare shoulders, a curiously triangular face whose odd shape was accentuated by a sharply pointed Vandyke beard and a prominent thin aquiline nose. The

dress was odder still. A soft collar and tie, a Norfolk jacket, and striped trousers. I discovered later that this was completed with carpet slippers and that the jacket was old and torn and the trousers threadbare and worn to a degree. As he stared down at me where I remained seated in the chair he poured some half-dozen revolver cartridges from one hand to the other and back again. I suppose this was meant to be ominous for me. His eyes never blinked. Of a very pale colour, they fixed themselves on me and remained without a flicker all through the interview. They seemed to have neither lids nor lashes. The effect was uncanny, reptilian, far more ominous than the ceaseless pouring of the cartridges. I recognized him from his police photographs. This was Dzerjinsky, chief of the Cheka. After a minute of silent standing he took a seat behind the desk and continued his staring at me. Not a word had yet been spoken.

This Felix Dzerjinsky was a Lithuanian of Polish descent. From the age of seventeen he had been a revolutionary and at nineteen had been arrested and sent to Siberia. Four years later he had escaped, was re-arrested, and escaped again. He had returned to Russia to take part in the 1905 revolution and this time was merely banished. In 1912, however, he had returned again and had been discovered and given a sentence of nine years' hard labour which he was serving when the March revolution brought his release. He was credited with having suggested the formation of the Cheka to Lenin.

When probably five more silent minutes had gone by, his unblinking stare began to embarrass me. I was becoming irritated, too, by his unending playing with those cartridges. I took out my cigarette-case and asked : "May I smoke ?"

He nodded. I held the case out to him.

"Will you have one ?"

"No."

I had made him break his silence. I lit my cigarette and waited. It was easier with a cigarette to occupy me. I puffed with pretended enjoyment and blew elaborate smoke rings. At last the door behind him opened and another man entered with a bundle of papers which he placed before Dzerjinsky and said something in a whisper. Dzerjinsky nodded and the man left us. The guard went with him. We were alone. Then Dzerjinsky spoke. His voice was soft but incisive.

"Perhaps you know who I am. I am Dzerjinsky, the Chairman of the Extraordinary Commission."

"I am glad to have the opportunity of meeting you, Comrade Chairman. I hope you will soon clear up this misunderstanding and order my release."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Your release, Citizen? I am afraid that is an idle thought. I have before me the most conclusive evidence that you are engaged in a plot to overthrow the People's Government. Have you anything to say to that?"

"Your chief investigator hinted at something of the kind," I replied. "I don't understand what you can mean. It is absolute nonsense—absolute nonsense."

He stared again at me and played with the bullets. Then he picked up one of the documents from the heap in front of him.

"Listen to this, Citizen." He read a detailed account of my recent activities. When he ended he put down the paper and said, "Well, Citizen, is that absolutely nonsense?"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about," I answered.

The bullets banged down on the desk with a clatter and rattle. "Oh yes, you have!" he said sharply. "And perhaps I have a way to make you talk."

His hand went down to a drawer in the desk. I rather lost my nerve in that instant. So Dzerjinsky found himself staring into the barrel of my revolver.

"Put your hands flat on the table," I ordered.

He obeyed. His face when he first saw the revolver had screwed up violently with astonishment and rage. As he put his hands on the table he smiled sardonically.

"Very well," he murmured.

"Now, Comrade Dzerjinsky, by pulling this revolver on you I seem to have given myself away. But, believe me, it's going to be worth it. You've sent a few of my friends recently to their deaths. Now I'm going to send you to yours, but before I shoot . . ."

How often in the history of assassins has the opportunity of the deed been lost because it seemed so important to the murderer to preface his action with an appropriate word! The opportunity was lost to me because somebody gripped me by the arms and my revolver fell out of my hand to the floor.

I know a little about wrestling. Within a second of the shock of being gripped from behind I had applied a vigorous *tour de bras* and my assailant crashed on to Dzerjinsky's desk, knocking Dzerjinsky himself to the floor, and scattering the papers. I was dashing for the door when something hit me a stunning blow on the head.

When I came to I was lying on the floor. Two leather-jackets helped me to my feet and replaced me in the chair by the desk. Dzerjinsky's pale, unblinking eyes stared into mine. He was pointing a large pistol at me with his right hand. His voice was quiet but grim.

"I want to know how you were able to bring that revolver in here."

I told him I had not been searched. He turned to one of the leather-jackets.

"Kissel should have searched this man when he arrested him. In failing to do so he betrayed the trust of the party, the workers and the Government. Have him arrested and tried by the tribunal."

"You see," he continued to me, "how just and logical I am. It is his fault that you tried to shoot me, therefore he must be punished. My logic also tells me that in attempting my life you confessed to your guilt. You yourself have admitted as much. Come, Citizen, you are a spy of the would-be interventionists. It is necessary that we should be able to defeat your plots and we wish to know your accomplices. If you will tell us who they are we will forget this little incident. After all, I provoked you. Your nerves were perhaps distressed. Now, will you tell me what you know and save your life, or must I give the order for your death?"

My head ached badly.

"I have nothing to say."

He rose.

"I am sending you to the Peter and Paul Fortress to let you think my suggestion over."

He signed to the guards and I was led from the room.

CHAPTER V

MURDER WITH A BLUNDERBUSS

I WAS delighted to find that my companion on the journey to the prison was Vidiakin.

He was in the seat next the driver and one of the men who sat beside me was pointing his revolver at the nape of my friend's neck. I felt creepy along my spine. The car was jolting and bumping, and if that trigger were to jerk it would be the end of Vidiakin.

The Fortress of Peter and Paul was the resting-place of dead Tsars. It was also a monument to human cruelty. The bones of men who had rotted in its subterranean cells were reputed to be still chained to the walls. We passed beneath the archway through which so many had gone never to return and in the Fortress yard found soldiers in jerkins, camp-fires, and soldiers again. We crossed the yard to an iron-bound oak door which shrieked on its hinges as it was pushed open by one of the guards. We entered a large room, with high windows and a lofty vaulted ceiling almost like a chapel. The air was cool and had a damp, almost musty smell. It smelt of the Middle Ages, of vague barbarities, of the Inquisition. Our guard summoned a messenger and we were conducted through this impressive ante-chamber to the office of the new Bolshevik governor, Comrade Blagonravoff.

I had never known any of the previous governors of this notorious old citadel, but Blagonravoff must have held the record for youth among them. Scarcely more than a boy, he had been a student when the war broke out and had become a subaltern in the army. Being a convinced follower of Lenin he had played a leading part in the soldiers' councils and later in the October rising ; and the custody of the most important enemies of the workers' Republic had been his reward for it. There was nothing at all of the prison governor about him. He might have been a rather jolly senior subaltern welcoming two new-comers to the regiment. With a humorous smile he offered us tea and bread and butter while he went to select, as he put it, our compartment for us.

When he came back he remarked that "the hotel" was full up for the night and that he would have to accommodate us both in one cell for the time being. As soon as we were alone Vidiakin told me his adventures. He had been examined by Model's assistant,

Poloukaroff, a former officer of one of the infantry regiments. Poloukaroff was apparently one of the madmen of the Cheka. His method of interrogation had been to show Vidiakin about a dozen revolvers and point one after the other at his head while hurling at him a stream of abuse, threats and questions. He had not seemed in the least interested in Vidiakin himself, only in what he knew about me and my supposed activities. Failing to get anything out of the phlegmatic soldier, he had cursed him roundly and sent him back to the detention room to wait until I should be ready to accompany him to the Fortress. Neither of us had any news of K——.

We spent the next few days quite comfortably and uneventfully. Blagonravoff announced that he would treat us as political prisoners. We were allowed into the yard for exercise, we had books from the prison library, and we had duties to perform about the building, fetching firewood, making fires and sweeping up the cells and corridors. One of our fellow-workers was Pourishkevitch, the member of the Duma who had been associated with Prince Youssoupoff in the murder of Rasputin. On New Year's Eve Vidiakin was released.

On the third day after his release I was called to Blagonravoff's office to receive a parcel. It contained food, a book, some cigarettes and tobacco, and came from Vidiakin.

When my bread and tea were brought in that evening I offered a cigarette to the warder.

"How are things going outside?" I asked.

He glanced behind him at the open door. "Bad," he replied. "Terrible things are going on in the town. I can't talk to you now, but I'll see if I can get you a paper."

True to his word, my friend the warder called me an hour later to carry in some firewood, and under cover of this duty handed me the latest bulletin. The principal news was an attempt on Lenin's life and a report that as a reprisal some soldiers had murdered the two members of the late Duma, Shingareff and Kokoshkin, while they lay in hospital. In several places of detention enraged bands had overpowered the guards and massacred the prisoners.

I was still reading when the warder came in, obviously excited. Locking the door behind him, he produced an iron bar from under his jacket and handed it to me.

"We want you to take this, sir," he said in explanation. "You know from the papers that in other prisons hooligans are slaughtering the prisoners. The old guards of this prison have been holding a meeting. We would protect our prisoners if we could, but we are too small a force here. So we have decided to leave it to the prisoners to decide whether they wish the cells locked or unlocked. Some think it safer to be locked in, others prefer to be free to run to their

own safety. It's a matter of personal choice, sir. In any case, I am giving you this bar to defend yourself. But which would you prefer, sir, locked or unlocked?"

Black or white coffee for the prisoners? Cell doors locked or unlocked? I weighed up how effective the iron bar as a weapon might be and decided to have my cell door left open.

"But if nothing happens you won't try to escape, sir?"

"I promise that if all is well you will find me tomorrow in this cell," I answered with complete sincerity.

"God bless you, sir," he replied fervently, and went off to put his thoughtful choice to some other enemy of this difficult republic of an amazing people.

I got so keyed up that night I tried to communicate my excitement to the occupant of the next cell, Tereschenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs in the late Provisional Government, by tapping Morse on the wall to him, but got no answer. When it seemed to be around midnight I could bear the inaction no longer. Leaving a bundle to look like a body in my bed, I opened the cell-door and crept out into the corridor.

I had no intention of escaping. I wanted just to explore. In the outer courtyard I could hear a crowd singing mournfully to the monotonous wheezing of a concertina. Across the corridor a door led into the inner courtyard where we usually had our exercise. In the centre of this yard was the bath-house and on the other side of that a door which I knew led into the dark passages of the bastion. I made for this first. The door was not locked but it was so heavy it was almost more than I could do to push it open. Immediately I had to drag with all my strength to pull it close again because the first thing I heard on the other side was the jingle of keys and the sound of approaching voices. There was no time to recross the courtyard. But the voices remained on the other side. One of them was Blagonravoff. He was making sure that the door was unlocked. He pulled it open a few inches. I flattened myself against the courtyard wall. The door was pushed back close again. The voices and keys receded on the other side.

When I dared to try again the door swung more easily back on its rusty hinges. Leaving it open behind me, I found myself in a very dark passage. Putting my back to the wall I took careful steps crab-wise forward, feeling with my hand along the wall in front of me. The ground was firm, but it became darker the further I penetrated from the faint moonlight leaking in through the half-open door-way. I kept on going in pitch darkness until I came to a gap of light on a level with the floor of the passage-way. There were iron bars across it, but looking through I could see snow-

covered ground and a few yards of the frozen surface of the Neva. A sentry passed beneath me. I went on in the darkness. Once I fell into a shallow pit. Something damp brushed across my face and there was a flutter like wings. A bat or an owl, perhaps. In other places rats scurried before me. Suddenly I heard a muffled volley of rifle-fire. The warder's fears had been realized and an attack had begun then.

It was impossible to tell from where the shooting was coming. I decided to push on in the same direction. Twice I came to cross-passages and heard sounds of men running and voices. Intermittent shots were also audible. Still I held on until I came to a window, high in the wall this time and protected again by iron bars. It was not difficult to clamber up. I had only to make sure no one outside could observe me.

In front of me was a snow-covered open space in the centre of which was a blazing fire. There was a wall behind it and a group of men armed with a miscellaneous collection of ancient and modern weapons. I couldn't see what they were doing by the wall, the crowd was too thick, but their attention seemed to be concentrated on something in the centre. Close by the camp-fire a terribly repulsive-looking Chinaman was going through the pockets of a jacket. He stripped off his own top-garment, donned the jacket, and strolled over to the crowd, where I lost him. The rifle-fire had ceased but the crowd by the wall was arguing and gesticulating. At last they opened out in the middle and left a clear ring in which a man was left standing alone. He was in his shirt and trousers. His hands were tied behind his back. The red glow of the fire fell full on his face and revealed it to me quite clearly. There was a gash on the forehead from which the blood was trickling. When I saw the face I was petrified with horror. I tried to shout but the sound died in my throat and I could only emit a wheezing gurgle.

The Chinaman stepped in front of the man in the shirt and pushed close up to his face an old-fashioned muzzle-loading blunderbuss. In the sudden spell-bound silence of the crowd around them he pulled the trigger. There was an ear-splitting crash and a cloud of smoke. In an instant the crowd was pushing round again, eager to see what happens when you shoot a man's face off.

I dropped from the window and ran without stopping along the pitch-dark passage, stumbling, falling, scrambling, until I had crossed the courtyard, leaving all doors wide behind me, and was safe in my cell, where I threw myself on my bed face down and cried like a woman. The man whose face I had seen blown away with the Chinaman's blunderbuss was my merry, lovely, music-hall ditty-singing room-mate, K——.

CHAPTER VI

INTERLUDE FOR PRISON SWILL

I MUST have looked ill next morning, for when the warder came he commented on my appearance and offered to fetch a doctor. He volunteered the news of the night. The hooligans had attacked the prison and some of them had penetrated into the courtyard. They had brought with them a poor fellow whom they had picked up somewhere and had shot him in the yard. Representatives of the Political Red Cross were now in the prison and he would ask the commandant if they could see me. Before long Blagonravoff, the warder, a doctor and a nurse were assembled in my cell. Blagonravoff explained that the organization had been set up to give medical aid to political prisoners who were in need of it.

"You're suffering from a severe nervous shock," diagnosed the doctor. "It's probably the effect of your arrest. I'll send you some medicine."

After the third week of my imprisonment I began to wonder when something was going to happen to me. Things had quietened down again in Petrograd. The population was really in a state of suspension. There had been a mild ferment among the political prisoners when the news had come through that Lenin had ordered the Red Guards to break up the constituent assembly which had met in Moscow. The Bolsheviks, of course, were in the minority and the social revolutionaries had begun by electing their leader as assembly president. Lenin had all the ruthlessness of Cromwell, apparently. Opinion among the politicians in the prison was that the social revolutionary party could not tolerate this dictatorship, that they would fight for their rights, and that the Bolsheviks would be thrown out and a coalition of radicals and liberals would be formed which would have allied support in re-forming the country on a democratic basis. The peasants were busy taking full advantage of the land decree. The workers in the towns were forming factory and workshop councils and talking glibly about managing their own industries. Trotsky was still conducting his wordy warfare with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk, while they replied by demanding still more and more of Russia. It couldn't go on of course. Even if the Bolsheviks continued to resist the democratic opposition of

their late friends, the Social Revolutionaries, things were bound to collapse any day now. A country could not possibly be made to function without an educated administration and its business classes.

In my talks with the doctor, who was still occasionally visiting me, he had mentioned transferring someone from the Fortress to the Cross Prison hospital. I asked him what were the most prevalent ailments among the prisoners in the hospital. He replied that rheumatism was the most prevalent complaint. After about a week I began to complain of rheumatism in my arms and suggested I might go to hospital. He examined me.

"No," he said, "there is nothing really serious. Unless the rheumatic pain is accompanied by muscular swellings or some really evident form of the trouble the commandant will not consider a transfer. I will give you more medicine."

So my muscles had to swell, had they? I remembered when I had gone in for physical culture that if I relaxed training for a bit and allowed my muscles to sag, on resumption of any exercises they had shown quite pronounced enlargement. For three or four days I exercised vigorously, gripping the end of my bed and raising myself from the floor morning, noon and night until I collapsed from exhaustion. I purposely overdid it. I was really in pain, but my biceps were obviously swollen and ugly. When the doctor paid his next visit he was quite concerned, and within another three or four days I was rewarded with my transfer.

I had had the idea that in getting out of the Peter and Paul Fortress and into the Cross Prison hospital I might find some means of arranging an escape for myself.

The ward was a large room containing twenty beds ranged along the walls, just like a ward in any ordinary hospital except that there were iron bars on the windows and the door was locked. As soon as the guard and the Red Cross attendant had left me the clothes were thrown off several of the beds around me and their occupants rushed towards me.

"What are you in for, mate?"

"Where are you from—*svoli* or *turagi*?"*

"Are you *domushuik* or *gromila*?"

These were the questions they hurled at me. A *domushuik* is a burglar who specializes in domestic house-breaking; a *gromila* takes on jobs requiring strength especially.

"He's no *domushuik*. He's a *gromila*, for sure. Look at his shoulders. Like a bull's they are," argued a particularly weedy-looking individual.

* Street or prison.

When I informed them that I was nothing more than a political prisoner they lost all interest and drifted away without another question. A youth of about twenty in the next bed to me practised sleight-of-hand with cards. Others were playing in groups with cards or dice. One on guard kept his ear to the door, listening. Only one other besides myself was in bed. He had the bed-clothes drawn right up to his chin. I learned later that the stakes in the games were articles of clothing or food and that he had gambled away his entire wardrobe, leaving himself stark naked. At one point in the day all prisoners who could walk were mustered in the corridor while the beds were inspected, and for these occasions another prisoner lent him an overcoat and charged him half his dinner for the convenience.

The watch was kept at the door because the penalty for being caught gambling was solitary confinement. When a warder approached the sentinel would shout out "*Chuma!*" and cards and dice disappeared and everybody was back in bed in a twinkling. *Chuma* is Russian for leprosy, but these rascals with their gift for picturesque language had adopted it as a general word for warning.

Our food was dished out by a warder at the door, each inmate taking forward his own plate. I had none. A young boy of about seventeen produced a plate from somewhere and brought my portion to me. "Can I look after you, sir?" he asked. He was a sharp, foxy-faced rascal, and I didn't like the look of him.

"How do you mean you'll look after me?" I queried.

"Make your bed, bring your food, take guard at the door for you."

"I can make my own bed and fetch my own food. I shall not be taking any guard at the door."

"But you will have to, sir. We all do that."

"That's enough. If I don't play your games I've no intention of keeping watch for you." I was speaking less to him than to a number of the others who were listening.

"But you're living in this place. It's our rule and you've got to do as we do." The boy was also conscious of the fact that we had an audience.

I was determined not to give way on the guard question, but I had no objection to having someone "fag" for me. "I've told you I'm not keeping guard in this place for anybody but myself and I mean it. If anybody has anything to say about that I'll be glad if he'll say it now, while I'm ready to deal with it."

I met the eyes of each man in the circle that had gathered around me. Fortunately nobody was disposed to challenge my right to dissociate myself from the customs of the community. I turned

to the boy: "All right. How much do you want if I take you on to do the odd jobs for me?"

He hesitated and countered slyly: "How long do you expect to be here?"

I burst out laughing. "How should I know? In any case, what difference does it make to our bargain?"

"Well, you see, sir," he answered quite solemnly, "I don't expect to be here very long myself, but if you were to be in for a long time I could always sell you to someone else when I go and so I'd be willing to do you cheaper. But if you're not staying long, then—well, the usual charge is five roubles a week, sir."

"Aw, get out, you skhans!*" The interruption came from a man on the next bed to me. Without ceremony he gripped my presumptive batman by the collar and hurled him into a corner. Then he sat down on my bed and began to talk to me. I remonstrated with him for losing me my labour-saver.

"That's all right. You'll get plenty of others. Any of them will do anything for you for a couple of roubles."

My new friend was an incurably cheerful fellow who was ready to laugh at everything. He had a great deal of loose skin on his cheeks which wrinkled up so much every time he laughed that he seemed to have no eyes at all but only bushy eyebrows resting on two enormous red carbuncles. He was a shoemaker who had been thrown into the Cross Prison because he had got mixed up in a crowd when an attack was being made on the Tsar's wine-cellars at the Winter Palace and the militia had arrested him. He had repeatedly protested his innocence but nobody would listen to him. He advised me to hand over my money for safe keeping to the warder as our fellow-inmates would steal the boots off a man's feet while he was sleeping. I did so and was immensely surprised when I got it back again.

It turned out after three days that my inclusion in this rogue's gallery was a mistake and that I should have been upstairs among the more honoured guests of the workers' and soldiers' Republic. By the time the mistake was discovered, however, the bed intended for me had already been occupied by another new-comer, and it was happily decided that I should continue to be housed with the professional criminals at night, retaining my amateur status by long visits to the political ward in the day-time.

Life on the political floor—and also in the political cells in the main prison building—had a good deal of the atmosphere of a not too regimented workhouse. Cells were unlocked for a considerable part of every day and the various groups of cronies met in one cell

* Scum.

or another to pass the time in talk or games according to their mood and fancy. The most distinguished member of our alms-house club was Hvostoff, the Tsar's Minister of the Interior who had once tried to murder Rasputin. We had also Bialezky, once Chief of Police in Petrograd, and Bourtzeff, famous Russian revolutionary journalist and denouncer of the notorious Azeff, the Tsarist police *agent provocateur* who had posed as a leader of the revolutionary terrorists and dealt out death in almost equal measure to both sides. Bourtzeff was in prison for denouncing Lenin as a paid German agent. It was characteristic of the period that Bourtzeff was still being permitted a large measure of freedom in propagating his political views from the prison.

Even more characteristic was the position of the leading capitalist in our fraternity. He was Zelenoff, the ship-owner who had given me my first job in Petrograd. His Petrograd business was one of those which had been confiscated under the nationalization decree because of his refusal to co-operate, but he still owned extensive interests in Sweden. While in the Cross Prison he negotiated several important contracts for his Swedish concern with representatives of foreign interests, and the "go-betweens" were quite important members of the Bolshevik Party who took their "cut" as naturally as if the deal had been carried out in Leadenhall Street. Communism was "Pie in the sky" still, and nest-egg insurance against the hazards of revolutionary fortune was of more practical importance to some of them than premature allegiance to the rather vague and imperfectly conceived new ethical standards.

The possession of money was really very necessary in the Cross Prison. The prison food was poor and inadequate. But even drink could be obtained if the prisoner was willing to pay for the privilege. For ten roubles paid to a warder I was given the freedom of the prison for the purpose of taking part in what was no doubt the first chess tournament held under the auspices of the Soviet Government. Food was our big complaint. Soup made from boiled salt herrings with potato peelings floating on the surface and a quarter of a pound of black bread full of husk was midday dinner. Supper was the same, with the addition of a pint of luke-warm "tea" which was usually made from crushed blackberries.

Nobody in the prisons believed that their oppressors could possibly remain any time in control of the power they had usurped so unexpectedly, and as the actual discipline within the Cross Prison, at least, was far from irksome when I entered it, the majority of the prisoners there seemed to regard their captivity as a regrettable interruption to be endured as philosophically as possible.

They made me think of the milder-mannered convicts in a

gaol where the tough prisoners had mutinied and cast out the warders. The old lags strutted up and down with the warders' guns on their shoulders while the better-class prisoners who had refused to fall in with the insurrection played cards in their cells and waited patiently for some kind of warders to come back again. Escape was impossible. The toughs had us too well guarded.

Such was my life from February to July of that year. I was long since convinced that the Cheka and the whole Bolshevik organization had completely forgotten me. I knew, of course, that just about the time I was transferred to the Cross Prison, when the Bolsheviks were refusing to agree to Germany's peace terms and the Germans advanced to Narva on the border of Esthonia and were threatening to capture Petrograd, the Soviet Government had hurriedly transferred itself to Moscow for greater safety, and Dzerjinsky and other leading Chekists had accompanied it. There was still a Cheka in Petrograd, and from all accounts it was active enough. But why should the Petrograd Cheka worry about me? If they knew about me at all they probably regarded me as being Dzerjinsky's special interest, and since I was safe under lock and key I could well be allowed to stay where I was until he gave instructions concerning me. But there was a strong possibility that Dzerjinsky had no further interest in me. Why should he? As far as I could learn in prison the Allies seemed to have abandoned the idea of intervention. At least, it was perfectly clear that whatever plans there might be in the air for driving out the Bolsheviks and re-creating an Eastern front against the Germans, they could no longer be plans with which I had been associated or plans which in any way involved me.

Forgotten by my friends, an object of indifference to my enemies, I walked about my cell and cursed and prayed for something to happen to me.

CHAPTER VII

FRAME-UP

IN the middle of July things suddenly woke up again. The Czech legions in the former Russian army, which the Bolsheviks had been sending at the request of the Allies across Siberia to enable them to sail for France and continue their fighting against the Central Powers there, had turned their rifles on the Bolsheviks and were sweeping everything before them in Siberia. Admiral Kolchak raised the standard of liberation at Omsk and with the help of the Czechs began marching towards the Urals. In Moscow itself there was a new revolution within the revolution. The Social Revolutionaries, disgusted at the terms which the Bolsheviks had made with Germany and bitterly resenting the growing dictatorship of Lenin and the Communists, had tried the double coup of assassinating Count Mirbach, the new German Ambassador to Moscow, and simultaneously imprisoning the Bolshevik leaders in the theatre where they were attending the all-Soviet Congress. The assassination had come off but the seizure of the leaders had failed, probably through the inborn inaptitude of the conspirators. Nevertheless the Social Revolutionaries were now in open rebellion. Led by Boris Savinkoff they had taken their stand under arms at Yaroslavl, between Moscow and Archangel, and were inviting the peasants and all other disaffected elements to rally to their assistance. Surely the Allies would act now, when Russia itself was rising against the Bolsheviks.

A few days later we had a big alarm. Fearing that the Imperial family might escape from Ekaterinburg and reach the safety of the advancing forces under Kolchak, the local Soviet had murdered the Tsar, the Tsaritsa, and all their five children. Bitterly as most of the political prisoners in the Cross Prison were accustomed to condemn the Tsar and his consort, we were deeply moved by the outrage. Murder of a Tsar was nothing new in Russia : half these men would have rejoiced if a bomb had burst over Nicholas II ten years before. But the Tsar was no longer Tsar and these murderers were Bolsheviks. Besides, we had to feel outraged because we wanted the whole world to feel outraged. Now the Allies simply must act. In the name of civilization they must intervene with all

the fire and sword the earth could muster and inflict the direst punishment on these unspeakable blackguards.

Sure enough, our prayers were answered. In the first week in August we heard that the British had landed at Archangel. A few days later we were told that the local Soviet had been overthrown and the Whites under British protection had established a Provisional Government of the North. And so on throughout the month. A big army composed of contingents of all the Allied troops had landed at Vladivostok. The Czechs were on the Volga. The British from Archangel were marching south to join them and the Cossacks had risen in force and were advancing from the Don. Petrograd was in a ferment. The Bolsheviki were panic-stricken, we believed. They would be flying for their lives and we should all be free within a month at the most. I was really grateful to the Germans for having forced the Government to retire to Moscow when it did and so remove me from Dzerjinsky's eye. All I had to do now was to wait patiently for the success of the interventionist arms which was inevitable, and lie low and attract no Bolshevik attention. Then a blow fell on me.

One of the privileges enjoyed by the political prisoners in the Cross Prison was the right to appoint from among themselves a "*starosta*" or elder who was officially permitted to visit all the cells and to hear the complaints of the prisoners and act as their mouth-piece to the prison governor. Our "*starosta*" was a certain Colonel Moroshkin. He came to me while I was still in the prison hospital and asked if there was anything he could do for me. I accepted a book which he offered and after he had gone racked my brains to remember where I had seen him before. I had seen him once in suspicious circumstances at the old Hôtel Astoria, and had asked for a report to be made on him. Officially he was in command of a section of the Russian Air Force. Unofficially he was a rather dirty type of secret police agent who was spying on his fellow-officers. When I remembered who he was I decided to have to do with him as little as possible. I must have shown him, I suppose, that I was purposely avoiding him. Probably he guessed that I despised and disliked him. Anyhow, when he made up his mind to curry favour with the Bolsheviki by discovering conspirators, he picked on me as his victim.

We were all in one another's cells one afternoon playing our usual games of cards or chess and whispering now and then about our hopes of speedy release when alarm was heard among the warders. There was some rushing of feet and banging of doors and a warder raced along our gallery shouting: "The Commissar is coming! Everybody back to his cell and keep the doors locked!"

Quickly !” We obeyed, shepherded by the warders, who could give us no information about the reason for this interruption to our easy routine.

When the Commissar appeared the object of his visit was a cell-to-cell search-party. In due course my door was thrown open and my clothing and person thoroughly searched by a Cheka representative in the presence of Commissar Pavloff, the prison Commandant, and a couple of Red soldiers. I was stood in a corner while they examined my bunk, mattress, and pillows, and even looked into the mug which stood by my plate on the table. For the rest of the day we were kept locked in our cells, even forbidden our visiting.

About nine in the evening I was called to the Commissar. In the Commissar’s room were four men in leather jerkins. One of them pushed a pencil in front of me.

“Read that and sign,” he ordered.

It was an official form with spaces in which were stated my name, age, birth-place, and other particulars. Then followed :

I, the undersigned, admit that I have had in my possession while in prison a small-calibre Browning revolver and that I have given it secretly to Citizen Moroshkin with intent that he should use it against the representatives of the Government of the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers.

I handed the paper back to the man who gave it to me.

“But this is rank nonsense. I have never had a revolver since I was arrested.”

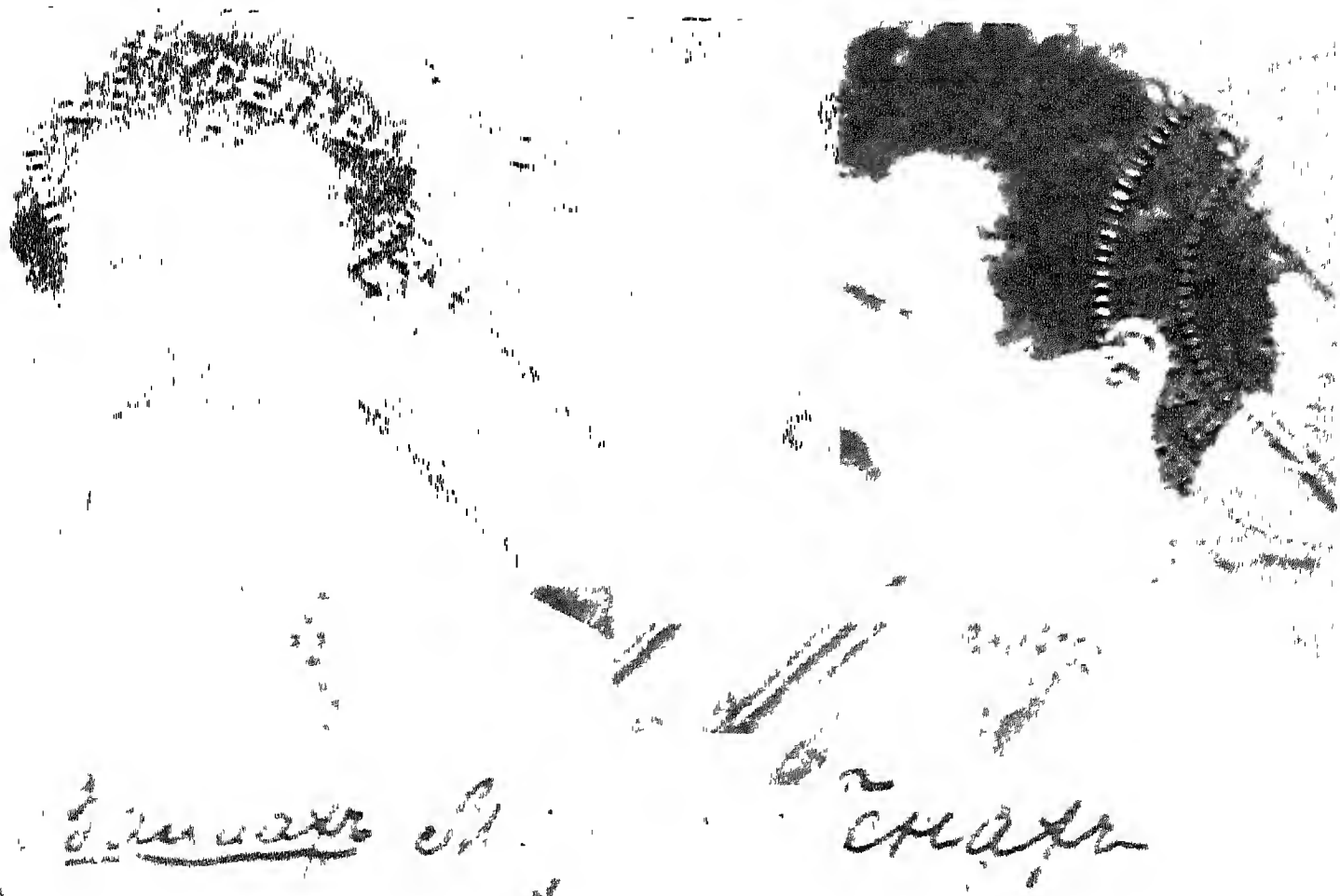
“That is a lie !” rapped out another of the leather-jackets. “Is it not the case that you had a revolver concealed on you while you were being interrogated by Commissar Dzerjinsky and that you attempted to take his life with it ?”

“It is true that I had a revolver with which I defended myself when I thought my life was being threatened by Commissar Dzerjinsky. But Commissar Dzerjinsky himself knew the revolver was not concealed. I had it because nobody had asked me to give it up or taken it away from me.”

“When you were admitted to this prison you signed a statement that you had no weapons concealed about you ?”

“I did, but it was superfluous. I was searched when I came in here and I came straight from the Peter and Paul Fortress, where I had been for two months in confinement.”

“The Committee of Interrogation is not interested in your stay in the Peter and Paul Fortress. It is investigating the statement of Citizen Moroshkin that while in this prison you, a dangerous character known to be most antagonistic to the Workers’ Government,



Litvinoff, celebrated Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs, as he appeared in the photograph collection of the Russian Secret Police.



Felix Edward Dzerjinsky, founder of the Cheka, who passionately defended the Red Terror to Mr. Blair before sending him out to the firing squad. A photograph taken by the Russian Secret Police at the time of Dzerjinsky's first arrest as a conspirator.

have for the second time been in illegal possession of a revolver which you gave to him to use against the prison Commissar. Do you still deny the truth of that statement?"

"Most emphatically. Even if I were the dangerous person you think I am, what could I do with a small revolver in a prison where I am surrounded by armed guards? Besides, I don't know Citizen Moroshkin. Everybody in the prison can swear that they've never seen me speak to him. I don't like him and I have never had anything to do with him. The whole thing's a preposterous invention."

"But Citizen Moroshkin made his statement on oath," protested the Bolshevik earnestly, as if he believed a thunderbolt would strike a man who swore to a false statement. He must have been one of the idealists of the Party.

"Oath or no oath," I replied, "Citizen Moroshkin is a liar, and if you won't believe me, will you please bring him here so that he can repeat his statement before me and then you can judge which of us is lying?"

"Yes, the request is just and reasonable," replied the idealist interrogator, and a soldier was despatched to fetch Moroshkin.

When he came through the office-door he was almost cringing with fear as if he expected me to jump for his neck.

The honest Bolshevik glared threateningly at Moroshkin and asked him if he were willing to repeat his statement in my presence.

"Yes," said Moroshkin, without looking towards me. "He gave me the revolver."

"When did I give you a revolver?" I thundered at him. "Give me some more particulars."

"You gave me the revolver the day before yesterday when I visited your cell to give you the newspapers."

It was one of Moroshkin's privileges to sell newspapers to the political prisoners.

"That's a damned lie! Where did I get the revolver you say I gave you? Answer me that. How could I get a revolver?"

"You didn't tell me how you received it. It was hidden in your cell. You said you would get more where that one came from."

I was beside myself with rage. I made a jump towards him, but the Red soldiers were on their guard for that and seized me.

"It's all a lie, a damnable, senseless lie!" I shouted, and struggled in my rage to get at him.

"Take Citizen Moroshkin away," the leading interrogator instructed two of his companions, and while the soldiers held me Moroshkin was led out of the room screaming at the top of his

voice : "I'm not a liar ! It's not a lie !" as loudly as if they were taking him out to be shot.

When he had gone I turned to the two interrogators who remained. "There is one thing I ask. If you still doubt my word, make an investigation into how I received the revolver I am accused of having had hidden in my cell. Who gave it me ? How did I get it smuggled in ?"

The Bolshevik pondered gravely. "The suggestion deserves consideration. There is only one difficulty. The chief witness in such an investigation could only be yourself. If you had accomplices in the prison they would deny it. The Workers' Government is lenient with its prisoners and it is possible for that leniency to be abused. Even if the witness Moroshkin is of the bourgeois class and untrustworthy, the crime of which you are accused is something which your record suggests you might foolishly be ready to commit. But I shall consider your representation. You will return to your cell."

Moroshkin had chosen a brilliant time to get me into trouble. Early next morning Uritzky, Chief of the Petrograd Cheka, was shot dead as he was entering his office in the former Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Later in the same day Dora Kaplan, one of Savinkoff's disgruntled Social Revolutionaries, put a bullet into Lenin's shoulder as he was leaving for a meeting in Moscow. Savinkoff's terror was alive again. Foiled in his attempt to spread revolution from Yaroslav, this arch-revolutionary had revived the mad methods he had used against the Tsar for a new use against the Bolsheviks. The Bolshevik reply came immediately.

CHAPTER VIII

RED TERROR

THE news of the assassination of Uritzky filtered into the Cross Prison round about the midday dinner-time. I was in solitary confinement, but it was told to me by the warder who brought me my dinner. Later in the afternoon he brought me a newspaper in which it was officially announced in the biggest scaring type surrounded by a deep black border.

Around midnight that night I was ordered out of my cell and lined up with a number of my fellow-prisoners in the corridor. Cross Prison is actually built in the shape of a cross. The junction of the arms is a wide well, five floors high, surmounted by a glass roof. As my cell was close to the well on the third floor I could see from where I stood along two arms of the cross and down the well also. On each floor the guards were turning out the prisoners and making them stand outside their cell doors.

Nobody could guess what this manœuvre might mean and we were all a bit paralysed by the apparent importance of it. Some sort of search, perhaps. At least, it wasn't the mob yet. We felt safe, comparatively, as long as the officials held sway. A fellow up the arm from me made a joking inquiry of two guards as they passed up and down our ranks with fixed bayonets on their rifles. He was rudely told to shut his mouth. This was specially ominous, for these guards had always been particularly good-natured. Clearly something was up and it was giving the guards a new feeling about us. By craning my neck slightly I could see at the bottom of the well a corner of the ground floor where a man in a cloth cap was in heated altercation with Pavloff, the prison Commissar, in the middle of a ring of guards, soldiers and Cheka leather-jackets. I could see the gestures but was too far away to hear the words that were being spoken. Somebody on our floor lost his nerve and began to wail. The guard dug him in the ribs with the butt of his rifle and reduced the wail to a whimper.

At last the meeting at the bottom of the well broke up and the group began climbing the iron stairways to the floors. They moved down one of the corridors, and almost immediately the guards started marching prisoners in small batches from that corridor

down the iron stair to be lined up on the ground floor. The man who was whimpering was just across the well from me. When the group stopped before him and his name was called he shrieked and went down on his knees, his hands uplifted in supplication. But it was one of the difficulties of the time that a supplicant was never sure to whom to raise his hands and an appeal spread over a group is wasted. He was jerked to his feet and hustled down the stairway. I followed him.

There were about a hundred and fifty of us in three long lines under close guard when the Commissar's group came down to the ground again. The man in the cloth cap ran his eyes over us, counting. I knew him later as Bokia, who had been Uritzky's chief assistant. Pavloff, beside him, was obviously distressed. In the few encounters I had had with this ex-steel worker, who commanded the Cross Prison, I had found him kindly and humane to a degree. He was fanatically Marxian in his economics but deeply humanitarian in his sympathies, and like many other members of the Bolshevik Party in the first period of the Workers' revolution who found themselves in positions of power over the bourgeois and intellectual classes, had been at pains to try to persuade them from their opposition to the regime with an earnest display of his own Marxian beliefs combined with a rough exhortation to be sensible and face the extinction of their class as a class with equanimity and resignation. There was a strong vein of humour in the black walrus-moustached Commissar, and most of his prisoners respected and liked him. He had been imprisoned as a "dangerous revolutionary" during the war for the "crime" of telling an officer he would rather be in the trenches than in the labour battalion to which the officer was transferring him. It was unwise of a Russian soldier even to show courage without orders. Now he was pushing his cap to the back of his head and scratching abstractedly with the one hand while the other was excitedly stuffing one of the ends of his black moustache into his mouth.

The picture was grotesque but it was thoroughly eloquent to us of his concern and dismay. Whatever it was that was in preparation for us he evidently knew all about it, and seeing the effect the knowledge was having on him we looked to him dumbly as to a mother. The idealist interrogator of my recent revolver incident seemed equally unnerved and we were being looked at curiously, I thought pityingly, by some of the soldiers. Only Bokia was grim and masterful, proceeding with his counting.

Pavloff pulled his cap off and swung round, interrupting Bokia. "Excuse me, Comrade, I must make a further protest against the method of this selection. This is no selection at all. There must be

some method that would be in accordance with the principles of justice. But all you have done is to select quite indiscriminately, ignoring everything. You might as well have said to me : 'Bring me a hundred men' !"

The idealist interrogator moved forward to support this protest but did not speak. Bokia held his finger poised in the direction of the last man he had counted and replied, without facing Pavloff, in an even, high-pitched voice :

"Comrade Pavloff, I have already informed you I have the orders of the council of the People's Commissars and have shown you the instruction personally transmitted to me and signed by Comrade Zinovieff. As for the method of my selection, I am also obeying the People's Commissars. My orders are to demonstrate the people's vengeance for the murder of Comrade Uritzky and the attempted murder of Comrade Lenin by the execution of five hundred enemies of the People's Government. Not five hundred chosen this way or that, but simply five hundred. The absence of discrimination is to make the warning against further assassinations more extreme. When you declare that I might have said to you : 'Bring me a hundred men,' that is precisely what the People's Commissars have told me to do. Only, to fulfil the instructions drawn up by the Committee of the Extraordinary Commission, from this prison I must take with me one hundred and fifty who die !"

The cold, dry voice stopped and the finger passed on.

Pavloff retired slowly to the rear of the group, twisting his cap helplessly in his hands. When the word "execution" had been heard, involuntarily out of the bodies of all the one hundred and fifty of us in the doomed ranks had come a variety of sounds from a suppressed hiss of surprise to a loud moan. No sooner had Bokia finished speaking than a wild clamour broke out. So long as we were uncertain what was to become of us we were prepared to keep quiet. But with death waiting in any case he would be a poor type of political prisoner who found no tongue to protest. Besides, it was entirely against the whole tenet of the revolution, for had not capital punishment been officially abolished ? In a twinkling the clamour had attained the din of a riot, with every man standing in his place and trying to reach Bokia's heart and reason with the eloquence of his eyes and the loudness of his voice. We were afraid to move because of the soldiers.

Bokia's mouth opened and we could see him yell, but his voice could never be heard over that frenzied row. He turned to the leader of the soldiers and yelled again and immediately the noise had subsided to a murmur like a late wave which, after the storm is

over, insists on breaking on the shore. Bokia's mouth opened once more and he visibly drew up from inside him every ounce of breath in his body as he yelled at the top of his voice :

"The blood of the people must be answered by blood ! There can be no appeal against the justice of necessity. Take them away !" He made a wild sweep with his arm and the soldiers closed round, using their bayonets to push us out to the prison yard.

As I was jostling with the others step by step to the door I caught the eye of the idealist interrogator. He turned at once to Pavloff and talked urgently. The two of them rushed at Bokia and an argument began. I was being pushed along backwards, for I was hoping against hope this argument had something to do with me and that it might be terminated in my favour before I was carried among these whispering, terrified sheep out through that door into the night from which none of us was to return. I saw Bokia nod and the interrogator rushed to the soldier by the door-post, who grabbed me by the arm and hauled me out as the pressure of the bayonet-prodded mob of the condemned was pushing me through.

"The Commissar has agreed you should not be shot because you have been accused of a crime against the prison regulations and the judgment has still to be delivered," the interrogator explained breathlessly, and the soldier led me back to my cell.

The five hundred prisoners of whom Bokia had spoken were shot that night in Petrograd. Five hundred more were shot the same night in Moscow.

The Red Terror had begun.

CHAPTER IX

THE HEART OF AN INQUISITOR

FOR the first few days after the massacre the prisoners remaining in the Cross Prison were bewildered, stunned, horror-stricken, resentful. Grief, where it applied, can be taken for granted. The warders and even the soldiers went about the place subdued and shame-faced. A new relationship required to be established. On both sides was the feeling that any bonds which had existed before had been finally broken. Before, they had been prisoners and guards, the same human clay with differences of class, creed, or political opinion. Now they were two opposite and different worlds which were suddenly seeing one another clearly for the first time and realizing the impassable gulf which must divide them. The real class war had begun.

My lucky plea to have the origins of Moroshkin's revolver investigated began its repercussions on the third day after the massacre. I was summoned to be interrogated by Madame Krilenko, wife of the generalissimo of the Bolshevik army and a member of the Petrograd Tribunal. She was a plain-looking woman of middle age, a schoolmistress in appearance and evidently determined to stand no nonsense.

When I finished my story of the revolver episode Madame Krilenko looked quizzically at me.

"Don't think I am misled, Citizen. I don't expect you to tell me the truth about that revolver—yet. Is it not the case that when we do know the truth of where it came from we shall find it closely connected with a plot for the capture of Petrograd and the overthrow of the Workers' Government?"

"I'm sorry," I replied timidly, "but I don't know anything of any plots to capture Petrograd."

Her eyes became gimlets.

"I think you do. Do you deny knowing Commander Crombie of the British Embassy?"

"I have never known any Commander Crombie," I answered.

She drew back slightly to observe me.

"It does not interest you to know that Commander Crombie is dead?"

"No, not in the least, since I never knew Commander Crombie."

Madame sank back in her chair, glared at me and shuffled her papers. Cromwell's revolution was the sensible one. He kept women out of it.

"I'm not taken in by your pretences," she suddenly began again in a high screech. "You can't fool me with your gentlemanly manners and your clumsily acted bourgeois obtuseness. We know your plots against the workers and your schemes to betray them to the capitalist governments. We got the evidence of them when we took possession of your British Embassy. Commander Crombie was shot while trying to resist the right of the workers to make an entry. He was a fool, but we have all his papers and codes. We have made prisoners of the Embassy staff and we know all his spies and agents. Commander Crombie's plot against the Workers' Government is broken. And so is Lockhart's. Lockhart is our prisoner in Moscow. His plot to murder our Commissars and bribe our Lettish soldier-comrades to turn against the workers has been revealed and all the necessary steps have been taken. Now will you tell us what you know? Now will you tell us who helped you to smuggle that revolver into the prison and what you were going to do with it?"

While she was screeching at me I was drinking in every word and trying at the same time to keep my face set in stolid indifference. All she was saying was news and exciting for me. But it was all something I had played no part in—if it was true—and when the woman wound up her tirade by dragging in that wretched revolver as though it had been a factor in a plot to overthrow the Bolshevik Government, the whole interview became so childish and absurd that I laughed right out at her.

The effect of my laugh was electrical. With another piercing shriek she shot back from me, opened the door, pushed aside the astonished guard outside it, and ran along the corridor calling: "Comrade Pavloff! Comrade Pavloff!" The guard glanced into the room to see what had happened and saw me sitting there every bit as astounded as he was. In a few minutes she was back with Pavloff, the prison commandant.

"Comrade Pavloff, this man has grossly insulted the representative of the Workers' Justice. I shall not interrogate him further. From his whole behaviour it is obvious he is an enemy of the working class and will do all in his power to overthrow the Workers' Government. I shall report what I have learned of him to the Tribunal and it will be for them to decide what shall be done with him. Take him back to his cell and keep him under close observation night and day. You will hear in due course regarding him."

The female of the species is more deadly than the male. Madame

Krilenko's reply to my insult came next day in the form of a deputation of leather-jackets, one of whom read me in theatrical tones a wordy recital of the reasons why the Russian workers and their soldier and peasant friends could no longer tolerate having me on Russian soil and ending with the intimation that it was proposed to remove me from it by means of execution to be carried out at the Cheka headquarters in Gorokhovaya Street the following morning at six o'clock.

The paper was handed to me and I was asked to sign.

"Sign what?"

"Sign the order to certify that you are aware of what it contains."

"What is it you want from me, Comrade—a reply to the invitation, a promise that I'll be there? Take it away. I won't sign it. I don't admit a word of what it says."

"It makes no difference whether you sign or not. The execution will be carried out just the same. It is only that you won't complain when we come for you and say you didn't have notice of it."

"I refuse to sign until I have seen Commissar Pavloff."

"Very well."

The deputation shuffled outside.

I had a brief but useless interview with Pavloff. The Tribunal had decided my case on the report of Madame Krilenko. There was no appeal. I persisted that I had had no proper trial and that there seemed small point in saving me from Bokia's squad to let me fall victim to the petty malice of a woman. He replied that the Workers' Government was fighting for its life and could not waste ceremony on an enemy whose guilt was plain. This was a new Pavloff with a new function and a new faith.

I was roused about three o'clock in the morning to be conducted to Gorokhovaya Street. The journey was made in an open automobile. I was sandwiched in the back seat between two guards with fat revolvers in their hands. The fit was tight and I was afraid to ease a muscle in case the guards would think I was about to make a bolt for it and slug me one. Rain was falling, wetting my eyelids and my mouth. A good-bye kiss, I thought.

It was eight months since my last visit to No. 2 Gorokhovaya Street. Everything was considerably dirtier. There seemed to be eight months' litter of cigarette ends. Evidently the Extraordinary Commission was too busy sweeping the undesirable elements out of Russia to find time to sweep its own rooms and corridors out. The white marble had the marks of greasy fingers on it. What draperies remained were torn and soiled. Justice embellished for the Tsar's Generals and Colonels was wearing badly in the hands of the proletariat. Everywhere, too, there was a heavy proletarian

smell, the pungent smell of old sweat-laden clothes, of unwashed, undernourished bodies, the smells of toil and grime, of brutish souls and stunted minds, the doss-house smell in which the workers of the world unpleasantly unite.

Petrograd was asleep, perhaps uneasily, but not the Cheka. The traditions of the Tsarist police that raids and arrests have an added terror in the night-time had been taken over with the building. Guards marched out and in ; officials hurried out and into rooms with files of papers. Prisoners of all classes crouched on benches. I was stopped for a few minutes beside an old woman in a black shawl whose twitching fingers clutched a cloth-wrapped parcel out of which a knuckle of dirty white bread stuck like a knee through a hole in a stocking. She was presumably a "speculator" who was learning the new lesson badly. Every official carried arms and an air of busy purpose. In that respect that atmosphere was different from my last visit when everyone, even Dzerjinsky in his funeral chamber and the armed guards, had been slack in manner, amateurish and ineffective. Here everybody seemed to be going at tension, winding himself up. Something, the shooting of the five hundred or the approach of the Allies, had released a spring in them. Thought of the five hundred sent a shudder through me. I looked around, half expecting to see blood somewhere. Among these officials bustling around me must be some of the executioners. They could not have carried out so wild a slaughter and left no traces, at least figuratively, upon their persons. I was leaving Russia at an interesting moment, it seemed, and under strange new auspices. I hoped they would be short-lived, anyhow.

"The English spy, is it? Bring him here, then."

A brisk-looking clerk with a leather portfolio interrupted my musing. We marched behind him down a corridor. Walking slowly in front of us was a tall, thin figure which was vaguely familiar. When it turned to glance at us as we passed, I saw it was Dzerjinsky. I had not expected to find him in Gorokhovaya Street as he had accompanied the Bolshevik Government last February to Moscow. I had an impulse to appeal to him and might have done so, but he spoke first, addressing the clerk with the important-looking portfolio.

"One moment. Where are you taking him?"

"This is a British spy sentenced to be shot by order of the Military Tribunal, Commissar. I am taking him to sign his acquaintance with the order for the execution which he refused to sign when it was first presented to him."

There was a pause while Dzerjinsky turned his unblinking eyes on me and looked me over.

"For what hour is the execution ordered?"

"Six o'clock, Commissar."

"He will sign later. Bring him to my room."

We followed him along the corridor and this time into a bare room furnished with no more than a table and a couple of chairs—Chippendale.

"Wait outside," he told the guards, and to the clerk, "I'll send for you."

"Sit down, Citizen."

He motioned me to a chair and himself remained standing. He had exchanged the Norfolk jacket in which I had last seen him for a plain dark coat. There was no sign of the cartridges appearing, although I waited for them. But he couldn't mask the queer theatrical fascination of his eyes, which seemed to be looking with their unblinking stare, not at my eyes, but into them as if he could see through my eyeballs and watch my brain working. The feeling was the same when one removed one's eyes from his. He could see through the top of my head and pierce my temples. I had fully five minutes in which to experience the sensation, for he had not given up his habit of silent probing of his victims. At last he smiled, sweetly. It was strange to see how his smile lifted the eerie look from his eyes without the eyes themselves changing.

"This is a fortunate meeting, Citizen. I am not often in Petrograd, and I am afraid if we had not met things might have gone with you rather sadly."

I brightened up perceptibly at this remark and tried to meet his friendly smile with one of answering sweetness. It was probably not very convincing. My difficulty was to think quickly of a suitable reply.

"So you think I may not—have to die?" I stumbled.

"But of course not," he replied in his softest voice. "It is curious I should have forgotten someone who could have been of so much help to us."

I knew what he meant, but my mind ran out to meet his. I was scared, really scared. I didn't want to die. Sitting in that room, I was horribly conscious of all that was going on in the rooms around it, of the clerk waiting with his paper for me to sign, the inexorable approach of six o'clock which would produce the courtyard and the short walk to the wall and the end of everything. I found something to like in this man and wanted to make him like me. If a man takes a liking to you, he doesn't send you out to be shot, does he? But what to say? I could only try to convince him that I wasn't holding anything back, that there was nothing in my head which, if given to him, would enable Bolshevik Russia to fight its enemies with one more hope of success or one less danger of defeat.

Dzerjinsky was speaking.

"Our Workers' Government is in very serious danger. Why should I conceal anything from you? Internally, we are young and inexperienced. There are too few who understand what is needed of us. We are handicapped by lack of technicians of all kinds. We have few doctors. We have fewer motor-mechanics. We lack also foremen, captains, men who can be the sub-leaders of our enterprises. Over all Russia we lack simple means of conveying simple ideas to the people, particularly the peasants, among whom the need of a new education is most urgent. There is a great new world to be built, all over the world, but first in Russia. I am convinced that we shall build it if we are given time. We must have time to cut our teeth. We have started on the most stupendous task men have ever consciously set themselves. The bigger the job, the more the enemies. We have many enemies outside and many enemies inside. Our Red Army must deal with the enemies attacking our front. It is my commission to combat all enemies attacking from the rear.

"Citizen Blair, I am determined that this new world shall be allowed to grow. If it takes twenty-five years, even fifty years, of struggle and sorrow, it will not be too big a price to pay. Whatever time is needed, I shall see that we secure it. I shall protect this new world of ours against its enemies, whatever the cost.

"The purchase of time has already begun. In the last week we have killed more than a thousand of our enemies in cold blood. Threats of terror will be met with greater terror. For every life a hundred lives. We shall be relentless in the suppression of counter-revolution, all forms of resistance and sabotage. The more ruthless we are, the shorter will be the period of our ruthlessness. What other way is open to us?"

As his eyes looked into the balls of mine he seemed to be addressing not me but the world behind and beyond me.

"What else can we do with the world outside against us? We have England, America, France, Japan, with armies on our territory. Counter-revolutionary armies are marching from Siberia, from the Don, from Archangel. The peasants may turn against us any day. The *bourgeoisie* within is impatient for our collapse and thousands are working for it. The governments of England, France, and America are using secret agents to foment revolt and sabotage against us. We must defend ourselves. Hesitation would be suicide. If we fail now it will all have to come again. History has given us this opportunity. It would be treason to abandon it. I am not a cruel man, not even a hard man. But if the success of the revolution demands that I be a hammer, I am a hammer. If it needs a sickle, I am a sickle."

It was queerly impressive to hear Bolshevism's chief executioner thus justifying himself and his terrorism.

"So you see, Citizen, why I should like to have your assistance. Within Moscow and Petrograd there are British agents at work, organizing a counter-revolution of the *bourgeoisie*, and they must be run to earth and dealt with. We have just unmasked one of their plots to bribe the Lettish contingents of our army to turn against us. Lockhart, the envoy of the British Government, was implicated and has been arrested. Commander Crombie, the British Naval Attaché, would also have been arrested, but he resisted our guards who came to search the Embassy and was shot after he had murdered one of our men. I have come to Petrograd to examine the papers we have discovered and to follow up certain clues. But we know that the real organizer of this plot and other dangerous plots is a certain Captain Reilly who is still at large. Now, Citizen Blair, I want you to help me. How can I find Captain Reilly—Captain Sidney Reilly?"

The name Reilly struck no chords and rang no bells in my mind. Nothing rushed up to my lips to be blurted out to buy my freedom with. The name Reilly meant just nothing to me at all.

I shook my head.

"Reilly? I don't know any Reilly."

"Come, Citizen, I have been telling you of the situation in which we find ourselves that you may understand how important it is for me to track down Captain Reilly and all his associates. I thought we were past beating about the bush with one another."

Dzerjinsky's voice was still soft but, as the Russian peasants say, he showed his teeth in his eyes.

"But I assure you I know nothing about any Reilly. I've never heard of him."

"Perhaps you do not know him by that name. Our information is that he is tall, lean, dark, and military-looking when he is Captain Sidney Reilly. But he really is a Russian by birth, and a master of disguises. At least, that is what they tell me. They say he is never the same person for two consecutive days, that he appears in a place like a weed in a cornfield and disappears again like water. But I don't believe these stories. They are merely the romantic apologies of those who are too stupid to catch him. But I shall get him yet. There is no spy so clever that he does not fall into a trap some time. Is there, Citizen Blair? Surely you have heard something of this master-spy of the British Government?"

I was crying inside me for sheer desperation. I wanted to convince him that I really could not help him.

"You see, Mr. Dzerjinsky, you say this Reilly has been operating with Mr. Lockhart from Moscow. I don't know Mr. Lockhart. He

was only a name to me when he was Consul in Moscow. I didn't even know he had been made an envoy to your Government until I read it in your newspapers when I was a prisoner in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Perhaps Reilly came to Russia with Lockhart in January. You see, I've been in prison for the last eight months. For eight months I've been dead so far as any Secret Service work is concerned. There's nothing so dead as a spy who falls into the hands of the enemy. You must know that. I don't know anything about anything unless——"

But the words I was about to say died on my lips.

I stared down at the floor.

When I raised my head I met Dzerjinsky's eyes.

"Your hesitation does you credit, Mr. Blair. I think I understand something of what you are experiencing. But you seemed about to tell me something. Perhaps you were going to name someone when you interrupted yourself. Would you like to go on now?"

I shook my head. All I wanted was the squad to come quickly and get on with it.

He tapped the table impatiently.

"But, Mr. Blair, I thought you had decided——"

I shook my head again.

"I've got nothing to say. I'm sorry if I misled you."

It was a miserable, disgraceful mumble.

"You know the alternative. There is a sentence of death already passed on you. It will be carried out within an hour now."

I made no reply. I stared at my boots and felt sick with misery.

"Very well. I'm sorry, but if you refuse to help me you are my enemy and I have my duty to perform with the enemies of my Government."

He walked to the door and asked the guard to summon the clerk who had taken charge of me. I followed the clerk to another room and signed acknowledgment of my own death sentence. I was left in the room with the two guards who had accompanied me from the Cross Prison.

I passed the next hour like a small boy recovering from a whipping.

At last they came for me and I was led through more musty, grime-smelling corridors into a courtyard. I tried to walk firmly, uprightly, but my head would jerk awkwardly on my neck and my feet felt loose and oddly detached from me. It was broad daylight, but there was no sunshine in the yard and everything had a raw, night-chilled, early morning feeling. A file of five soldiers waited by the opposite wall under charge of some sort of an officer. The walls of the building were grey with years of soot. Several motor-lorries with dull grey hoods stood around. The scene was cheerless and

dispiriting. The guards marched me to the wall and left me without ceremony. The commander gave an order and the soldiers shouldered their rifles and lined up opposite me. A leather-jacketed mechanic swung the starting-handle of one of the lorries, a big Packard. The Commander and the soldiers had their eyes on him. Apparently they were waiting for him to get it started. Vaguely I remembered hearing something of a practice that had been employed at some executions for disobedience or desertion among the troops behind the front line. They started up a noisy motor-lorry engine, but whether it was to drown the volley or annoy the victim or dull the perceptions of the firing-squad I was uncertain. The fellow swung and swung again without result, dashed round to adjust the throttle, dashed back, swung and got a kick and a back-fire. He scratched his head as if the behaviour of the engine puzzled him. Incompetent Russia. . . . The morning air after the stuffy rooms and this fellow's incompetence brought back to me a slight feeling of superiority.

The Commander approached me and produced a cloth.

"Your eyes," he explained. "Turn round and let me bandage them."

"No, no," I pleaded.

"The prisoner's eyes must be bandaged according to the regulations," he announced gruffly and seized hold of my arm to turn me. I resisted and he slapped my face. But as he did so he glanced up to a window on his left as if afraid of a reproof for his action. I followed his glance. The window was open and beside it stood Dzerjinsky and another man. Dzerjinsky must have made some sign which I did not see because the Commander desisted.

"I shall tie your hands, then."

"No, no. Please !"

The Packard engine suddenly roared. There was no exhaust pipe on the lorry and the din was terrible. It made me frown and the Commander of the soldiers grinned at my annoyance. I could not hear what he said, but he took several paces to the right of me and waited. I had made up my mind what I should like to do. I would give myself one last fling by waiting until the instant before the officer gave the word to fire, when I would hurl myself bodily at him and bring him to the ground. It would be a poor little abortive fling, for I should be shot or clubbed to death the next moment, but at least I would go down fighting. I wasn't afraid of dying now. I was solacing myself with the thought of my feeble gesture.

The Packard was roaring on. The officer raised his hand. I could see him clearly. He was slightly in front of me. The soldiers had their rifles levelled.

“One !”

I could barely hear his voice above the roar of the engine. The soldiers certainly could not hear it, but they were watching his hand drop.

He raised his hand again.

“Two !”

The hand fell. Up again. I held my breath. I had every muscle tense for that side-spring. The hand went a shade higher than before in preparation for the final signal and I willed myself to leap sideways and forward.

“Stop !” .

As my body moved a voice called faintly through the engine roar from the window above me. It was Dzerjinsky. I was in the air, hurtling towards him, when I saw the surprised Commander turn and look up, his hand still uplifted. Then Commander, courtyard, everything went reeling high over me and my hand banged against the flag-stones.

CHAPTER X

THE CELL OF LICE

WHEN I came to, it was to pitch darkness. I was lying on my back somewhere, not full out but with my neck and head against my chest in a position which I was finding extremely uncomfortable. The air I breathed in was warm and stank horribly.

In the pitch darkness that acrid smell was a powerful reviver. I squirmed to a sitting position and put my hand down beside me. I withdrew it hurriedly on contact with something soft and sticky which seemed to confirm one of the disgusting possibilities of my situation and the smell's origin. I put my hand to the wall behind me, against which I had been reclining, and scrambled to a standing position. Only the fear of falling again among the mess on the floor held me upright, for my head had met a stunning wallop on the invisible ceiling. Evidently I couldn't stand bolt upright. When the pain of my head had eased a spot I felt cautiously about me.

There was a wall about twice the breadth of my shoulders. Stone it felt like, rough, undressed. I could feel the narrow gaps between the stones unfilled with mortar. At right angles there was another wall. This was longer, possibly twice the other. Another short, another long wall. I felt up to the ceiling. It was stone also. I hadn't the courage to touch the floor with my naked hand again. I was in a stone box, oblong in shape, about three feet wide and five feet long, and less than six feet high. Pitch dark, warm heavy air, no door, no windows. I was buried alive !

When the thought forced itself on me I wasn't wildly panicky. It wasn't quite like finding oneself in a coffin, I suppose. I could move. There was room to turn, to crouch, to lie, to flex one's muscles in. And one could shout. Yes, shout. Hallo ! Hallo ! My voice sounded dull and lifeless in the chamber. I shouted again louder. I thought it would hit back sharply off the stonework. But no. Hallo ! Hallo ! I could scarcely hear myself. How thick these walls must be. But stone would echo, however thick, I imagined. Would it if it were deep in the earth ? My mind stood still with this possibility. But someone had put me here. And this stuff on the floor. Someone else had lived here and on this floor performed the actions of living.

Smells are forgotten, even the foulest, when the nose is full of

them. Darkness is bearable when you know its dimensions. Even excrement is homely and comforting when it is a proof that what you are enduring others have endured.

Four things worried me—how long I could remain in this crouching position without being compelled to lie down, whether there was any supply renewing this fetid air, how insufferably warm I was becoming, and whether there was anything else besides human filth on the floor.

Just then I became conscious of a pricking, itching sensation on my left leg. It was under my trousers, just at the top of my sock. I put down my hand and scratched. In the darkness my fingers removed something pulpy and wet. I wondered if I had been injured and was touching my own blood. I couldn't see anything, of course, only touch and feel. The itching continued on the other side of my leg. I was beginning to scratch there also when I felt the same prickling itch on the other leg, then on my hand, and even on my neck. My hands went quickly from place to place. My fingers scratched. Then the truth came to me with a flash and a roar. I was a prisoner in that darkness and I was being eaten alive by an army of lice !

At least, I don't know if I was so quickly able to identify my assailants as lice. I doubt it. Identification must have come later. My recollections of what followed my discovery that I had a host of companions in my tiny cell are far from clear. Somewhere on the floor of that cell while I lay on it must have been this colony of millions of lice. I had lain among them as among the other stuff on the floor and they had crawled all over my clothes. Now they were under my clothes, crawling all over with their minute sucking mouths, sucking at me.

Suddenly light flashed into the darkness. There was a hole in the wall. A hand shoved in a plate and a voice said : "There's your meal." Immediately my face was down at the hole and I was clutching at the edges of it, peering with my dark-bleared eyes, scrabbling to see.

"Let me out of here, let me out ! You can't keep me here—you can't, you can't ! It's swarming with lice !"

"Take your plate and don't fuss !"

I took the plate mechanically, but as I took it I realized how ravenously hungry I was.

"Go on, eat up ! I can't wait here all day."

I stuffed my mouth with the food. I forgot about the dirt on my fingers, perhaps lice. I shouted while I chewed.

"But the lice—these lice ! They're eating me alive. Surely you can't leave me here to be eaten up by lice."

There was a throaty chuckle.

"Lice never ate nobody. They just tickle."

"A drink. Can't I have a drink?"

"Drink's your next meal. Wait for it."

"My bladder's bursting. Let me out."

"Use it to wash off the lice."

With another chuckle the plate was snatched out of my hand and the hole closed, leaving me again in the dark.

The battle of the lice began. I tried leaving them alone, enduring the pain, in the hope that they would eat their fill of me, be satiated, and leave me in peace even if they continued to cling to me. It was no use. Maybe some were satiated. If so, there were a hundred others ready to replace them, to continue the pricking agony. All at once I could feel them beginning a march, a wave of them advancing up my legs. That was my berserk moment. I couldn't fight them with my clothes on. They were at the same time on top and underneath. I tore off my jacket, my trousers, my shirt. In my frenzy I tore the legs of my trousers down the seams. In a few minutes I was stark naked but for my socks and boots. Then I fought back those waves, pushing steadily with my hands down my legs. I plucked handfuls off my thighs and slabbered them on the walls. I fought them down to my knees. I had to make that my Hindenburg line. They were on my body above that, of course. On my chest, my stomach, my back, in my hair, around my eyes. But only stragglers. Odd groups of three, four, a dozen or maybe twenty at a time. That was nothing. That was comfort and normality compared with the hordes swarming up my calves and ankles. I held my own around the knee-line. Scrape, wall—scrape, wall. They must have been falling off the wall to join the mass on the floor again. I don't know. I couldn't see in the darkness. Anyhow, they didn't stop coming. I couldn't stop scraping a second without their gaining on me. The question at the back of my mind was : what would happen when I became tired, as I must sooner or later, when I could crouch here fighting no longer, but must sink from sheer exhaustion down to the floor among them? They would just swarm over me then, defenceless, into my eyes, my ears, my nose, my mouth. . . .

The time came when I must have fallen. I don't remember it. I really remember nothing of what happened after I started fighting them with my clothes off. I vaguely remember waking up once to find the light shining on me and a hand offering me a mug of something which I drank very hurriedly.

I next remember a most intense pain and realizing that I was being carried somewhere.

Someone asked : "How long has he been in there?"

Someone else replied : "Six days."

"And did he tell you anything?"

"Nothing important. He mentioned only one name, a fellow called Moroshkin, a colonel in the Cross Prison. He's a poor fish, but we shot him—for safety."

PART THREE

SATURNALIA IN A BATH-HOUSE

CHAPTER I

A BUCCANEER OF BOLSHEVISM

"You are Dorian Blair?"

"Yes."

"Formerly an officer in the Tsar's Flying Corps?"

"Yes."

"Formerly in charge of supplies and replacements for the second squadron of the Tsar's Flying Corps stationed at Tsarskoe Selo?"

"Yes."

"Formerly attached to the Ministry of Transport of the late Provisional Government?"

"Yes."

"You are a trained automobile engineer?"

"Yes."

"You can drive motor-cars and know how to keep them in good condition and can also effect repairs?"

"Yes."

The Prison Commandant was reading the questions off from a paper in front of him, glancing up at me as I gave each answer. He rose to his feet.

"Then you are to report at once with all your belongings to the Petrograd base of the Automobile Squadron of the Northern Army where work will be found for you to do. Here is your authority to leave the prison and the address to which you are to go."

And he held out his hand.

I took it in a daze. I had come to his office expecting anything from an accusation of another crime to the firing-squad itself, and the amazing man was shaking me by the hand and bidding me God speed, smiling at me in a perfectly friendly manner, much as if he were the head master of a school who had found a post for one of his pupils, or the Governor of an English gaol saying a man-to-man good-bye to one of his prisoners who had sworn to make good. I had learned to expect the most remarkable surprises and contradictions from the Bolsheviks, but to be handed my own release from gaol in this fashion was more than my mind was willing to cope with. It went blank completely. I stared at the smiling Commandant like a dotard, shook the hand he offered me without a word or a sign, turned

automatically when the warder touched me, and followed him through doors, across a courtyard, through a gate and to the street, all without the least attempt to grasp or even begin to think about what was happening to me. I had a vague feeling of distrust, of hostility, of waiting for the "catch" in it, but nothing more. Then the warder, without a farewell word, clanged a door behind me and I was alone, actually alone, on the open street.

There was no one in view either to left or right. In front of me was a large open space, behind me a blank prison wall without even an eye-slit in the door. After nine months of guards and cells I was alone and free to walk this way or that, and I was completely unobserved. Yet I was ashamed and embarrassed as if they had pushed me naked into a room full of people. For a long time I stood, struggling to get back my mental breath. At last I pulled myself together and slouched off down the empty street, hugging the prison wall, fearful and unhappy, just like any ex-convict released after serving the punishment for a crime of which he has been mortally ashamed.

Was I free? Nothing had been said to me of the terms on which I had been released. I had merely been told I was to be given work. I knew enough of the conditions prevailing outside the prisons to realize that any measure of freedom which had been given to me was limited indeed. Without money or ration-cards I could not eat and the ration-cards could not be obtained without some official status. Nor was it likely that I should be able to live long or move far without being challenged to produce passes and papers giving me the right to live. Escape out of Russia was impossible without friends and assistance. It required no profound consideration to convince me that the only thing to do was to obey my instructions and report to the army automobile headquarters; so I slunk along, scarcely looking to left or right, clutching my instruction-papers in my hand so that I would produce them at once if anybody so much as looked suspiciously in my direction, and warming slightly as a thin savour of the realization entered my soul that it was a street I was walking on and not the stones of a prison yard or a prison cell.

The place to which I had been instructed to report was a large private house, once the house of one of Russia's richest men. But if they thought they could squeeze the transport needs of an army into the private garage of a millionaire, the Bolshevik authorities might just as well have attempted to sleep the army in the millionaire's bed. Not merely had the cars and lorries which had been assembled there overflowed the garage and the stables and the out-houses and the house itself; they had actually overflowed the gardens and the

carriage-ways and were meeting me half a mile down the street itself, and a more heterogeneous collection of vehicles I had never seen. There were cars of all makes and sizes, of all ages and all conditions, and they suffered a progressive deterioration in usefulness as one advanced to the house itself. Inside the grounds the scene was like a knacker's yard. It was a veritable scrap-heap of cars—cars without engines, cars without bodies, bodies without wheels. It seemed as if a gang of insane wreckers had swarmed over them, each removing whatever had taken his fancy.

The same chaos ruled all around. Rank grass grew at the sides of the carriage track. The lawn between the cars that stood on it was a gaping sore of furrows and wheel-marks. Branches had been torn off trees, statues overturned, and flagstones prized out of the courtyard. The house itself looked a tattered, dejected ruin with hardly a whole pane of glass in its lower windows. In a corner of the courtyard when I entered some men were struggling to raise a car into the air by means of ropes thrown over some projecting rain-spouting, which came away from its fastenings, letting the car down with a sickening crash. Outside at the gates a soldier in a uniform without buttons and held together with string had waved aside the papers I had offered him because he obviously could not read them. This was the world as Bolshevism was remaking it—tattered illiteracy keeping guard over chaos.

It was written on my instructions that I should report to Commissar Kisseleff, so I presented myself to a young fellow in uniform who was typing at a desk in a corner of the entrance-hall and asked him where the Commissar was to be found. I was still very nervous of the people I was encountering in my new role of a prisoner at large and approached this clerk with considerable deference, but he gave me a friendly answer and directions to a room upstairs. I passed up a marble staircase bare of carpets and stopped at the Commissar's door. It was open, as it was then the custom of Bolshevik Commissars and higher officials always to keep the doors of their offices open as a symbol of their accessibility to all who had business with them. But I knocked before I entered and the Commissar looked up from his desk. He was a youngish man, about thirty-five, I should judge, clean-shaven, with rather delicate, keen features, and a large high forehead.

I told him my name and who had sent me. He nodded.

"You don't feel very friendly to the Workers' Republic?" he asked with a smile which indicated that he was willing to grant I might have some justification for unfriendly feelings.

I replied that I no longer had any feelings of any kind towards the Workers' Republic or any other.

He nodded again.

"I don't like prison any more than you do. It's a waste of man-power. But when the man-power would work against us if we left it free, there is no other way—for the present, at least. I'm not going to try to persuade you that I as a Communist am right and you are wrong. I wouldn't believe you if you agreed with me. But, Comrade Blair—you would rather be working than lying in prison, would you not?"

There was a good, honest, man-to-man ring about the way he put the question.

"I certainly don't want to go back to prison," I replied ; "but, as you say, I'm no Bolshevik. What is it you want me to do?"

He smiled again.

"Need you ask? You had your eyes open when you were coming here to see me. Outside this house there are at this moment one hundred and fifty-eight cars allotted for the use of the Northern Army. I have charge of all transport in the Petrograd area," he added in a half-apologetic parenthesis. "Of that number there are perhaps a dozen that are really fit for use. Don't be alarmed. I'm not going to ask you to put the other hundred and forty back in order. It would be enough for the moment if you would help me to keep the present dozen fit for use. I need competent engineers, and competency in engineering is something with which we are not well supplied. I am told you are a competent automobile engineer. Would you like to try?"

I was bursting to say yes. I had certain qualms, of course. The Northern Army must be resisting the Allied forces which had been landed earlier in the autumn at Archangel and Murmansk. On the other hand, if I didn't take on the job, no doubt somebody else would be found, and keeping twelve cars in running order could not have much effect in maintaining the Bolsheviks in power or helping them to overcome their foes.

"If I don't accept your offer, I go back into gaol again, I suppose?" I asked as casually as I could.

"I have nothing to do with the prisons," he answered, and I fancied that he drew himself away from the idea. "That is a matter for the Cheka."

"In that case, I have no objection to doing the work you ask of me, Commissar Kisseleff," I said. "Provided it is clear that I am not being asked to support the aims of the Bolshevik Government?"

"Your worries on that score are your own, Comrade," was Kisseleff's reply. "We ask little from your generation. Our hopes are from the next."

It was impossible to take offence at the tone, even inwardly, the

words were spoken with such quiet conviction, tinged perhaps with regret. This was a Bolshevik whom one had to respect.

"Your official post will be technical supervisor of the automobile garage of the First Workers' and Peasants' Army. You will be under the command of Comrade Rook and take your instructions from him. Also you are responsible to him for the efficiency of the vehicles which he puts in your care."

He wrote me out a paper to take to Comrade Rook.

"I believe you are a good engineer, Comrade Blair. It will be a pleasure to me if I can feel that there is someone working with me who has an engineer's pride in machinery that is always fit to do its job."

He held out his hand. For the second time that day I shook hands with a Bolshevik.

If Commissar Kisseleff had been something of a surprise, Benjamin Rook was also unexpected. He was a Jew, of course. I have no idea whether there were any Jews numbered among the crews of the infamous pirate of the Spanish Main—Captain Henry Morgan, but Rook looked and lived as if he had stepped straight out of that life and that period. He was short and broad, big-muscled, a little ox of a man. It seemed that Nature had first meant him to be rather more than average height ; but finding his body to be too great a weight for his lower limbs to carry conveniently, she had allowed them to bend until the bulk of his shoulders and trunk was just a square box sitting on top of a thick round O, the legs being like two halves of a heavy rubber tyre which were steadfastly trying to join up again. On top of the square box was an enormous head and sticking out of the head an enormous hook of a nose, a Cyrano de Bergerac of a nose, with a twist to one side, and right in its tip, like a jewel set in the beak of a toucan, the most prodigious blackhead that a nose can ever have grown. It was a prize among blackheads. It called for a Crystal Palace show, for judges, admiring throngs, and the company of lesser blackheads on hundreds of meaner noses among which it could shine forth with all its own imperial worth. Add to this black eyes under large, heavy lids ; curling, almost ringletted hair ; a swarthy, leathery complexion, and a mouth like a knife-slash, and you have the physical picture of Benjamin Rook, a stage caricature of the popular conception of a buccaneer, if ever there was one. His dress and manner completed the likeness.

Like all the soldiers and officers of the Red Army he wore the field uniform of the old Imperial Army shorn of all decorative trimmings and distinguishing marks, but he had added to it a pair of jack-boots which he had picked up somewhere, slashed open almost

down to the ankles to permit the curves of his extremely bow leg to get into them, a cutlass, two revolvers, and several cartridge belt.

I could not take my eyes off that Goliath of a blackhead which the nose seemed to keep pushing up at me as though the blackhead itself were the nose's own eye and it had to carry out its own inspection ; the nose smelled at me, the blackhead-eye peered at me, and the two normal eyes behind them looked on, as if forming their own judgment which might be quite different from the less-considered opinion of that irrepressible scout, the nose—then a sudden retraction of the whole head and the mouth opened like a shark's and grinned at me. Rook was incredible. I should add that his voice was thin and fussy as an old maid's. He introduced me to a rather colourless individual—anybody would be colourless after Rook—named Bogroff, who was the pay-clerk and cashier of the establishment, and Bogroff took me off to see to the allotments of my sleeping-space and ration-tickets.

It was from Bogroff that I learned what were the functions of the automobile garage of the First Red Army and what my duties were to be. We were all housed, apparently, in the home of the former millionaire, and I was given a small room in the upper part of the house, once a servant's bedroom, I suppose, which I was to share with another of the personnel named Tchekoff. It was rather a relief to me to discover that though we belonged to the army, the automobile garage seemed to have no connection with army activities at all. The business of the unit was to supply the cars and drivers for the use of the commissars and higher officials engaged in the administration in Petrograd itself. There was other work concerned with the movement of supplies which Bogroff mentioned, but there seemed something vaguely mysterious about that side of the duties and I was still too nervous to attempt to pry. My job was to have cars and lorries ready for use as and when Commander Rook should call for them, to instruct the drivers in the simpler running repairs, and to check in and out the alcohol-spirit which the unit was using in place of petrol.

In my anxiety to make good and keep out of prison, and also to fulfil the trust which Kisseleff had imposed in me, I set about my duties so seriously that in a few days I was able to get a few of the better derelicts into commission again to relieve the pressure on the cars which were in constant use and give me a chance to have them overhauled. The trouble with motor transport under the Bolshevik regime seemed to be that they were in grave danger of rapidly using it all up. There was no production of new cars whatever and practically no repair and maintenance work was being done. In the view of most of the active workers for the regime there was no time for that

sort of thing and there was also no inclination. The regime was in a hurry. It was fighting for its life against enemies outside and against ignorance, hostility, misunderstanding, and disorder inside, and it was easier to run a car to a standstill and requisition another than to worry about keeping the first car in order. The general idea among the Bolsheviks themselves seemed to be to bring into existence as quickly as possible everything that had never existed before and that everything already in existence could either be abolished or left to take care of itself. It was this attitude, presumably, which Kisseleff was out to combat.

I soon found that neither Rook nor Bogroff cared much about Kisseleff's aims in this direction. They made it quite plain, too, that they had no particular regard or respect for Kisseleff. Their idol among the Commissars with whom we came in contact was a certain Rabinovitch, who had control of all the military supplies in the Petrograd area. Rabinovitch and Rook were close friends, although Rabinovitch was as handsome and debonair as Rook was grotesque and ugly. He was an Armenian Jew, tall and slim, with dark aquiline features and strong white teeth which he was always showing in a friendly but faintly ironic, self-contained kind of smile. He was very like Douglas Fairbanks in appearance and manner, even to possessing the same moustache.

We had a lot to do with Commissar Rabinovitch because it was from him that we obtained the orders for all our spirit and other supplies. In spite of his appearance, which might easily have stood against him in a revolutionary world in which the social and aesthetic graces were seriously at a discount, Rabinovitch was high in the counsels of the Communist Party in Petrograd and was an intimate of Zinovieff, who was now President of the Petrograd Soviet and, since the departure of the Government for Moscow, the big boss of the area. It was obvious that, in Rook's and Bogroff's opinion, Rabinovitch was the man to know.

Neither Rook nor Bogroff were much interested in my efforts to put a few more cars on the road, but they were definitely keen that I should keep three Crossley ambulance-wagons which we had in good service, and it was these which they themselves were most frequently putting into use. Several times in the first few weeks of my work at the garage I was ordered to have the ambulance wagons ready, and Rook and Bogroff, or Rook and Tchekoff, and sometimes all three, drove them off for a destination undisclosed. Sometimes they were back in a few hours, once or twice they were gone for a couple of days. It was no business of mine where they went, of course, I had merely to obey Rook's orders. One morning they had left early on one of their secret trips and I was busy in the little office

which had been allotted to me making up a report when I heard the noise of the Crossley engines coming back into the yard. I looked out of the window and saw Rook and Tchekoff assisting Bogroff down from the driving-seat. The man looked pale and ill, and I went out at once to see if I could be of help.

"What do you want here?" squeaked Rook in his thin, high voice. He was obviously very agitated. "This has nothing to do with you."

"I'm sorry," I stuttered. "I thought you might want me to help you."

Bogroff's head had fallen on Rook's shoulder, his eyes were closed and he was white as a sheet. He had fainted and there was a nasty-looking wet stain all over his chest and arm.

"All right, now you're here, you'd better give us a hand. Take his legs. Carefully. He's hurt," Rook grumbled with a bad grace, and I did as I was told.

We carried him into my office and Rook stripped off his clothes while I ran and fetched water and some clean rags. He had been shot in the shoulder and in the thigh. The wounds did not look very serious, but from the condition of his clothing it was evident that the man must have been weak from loss of blood.

"Shall I try to get a doctor?" I asked Rook.

"No, no, no! We can't have a doctor here!" he piped excitedly. He stared down his long beak at Bogroff, who was recovering consciousness and beginning to moan. "Get that blood washed off him and tie him up and put him to bed. I'll see about a doctor if he really needs one."

Tchekoff and I did what we could for the wounded Bogroff and put him to bed with a sleeping-draught which Rook produced from somewhere. I was afraid the narcotic would probably kill him in his weak condition, but Rook was insistent.

"We don't want anybody to hear him if he turns noisy," he muttered.

Down in my little office again, Rook closed the door and put his back on it.

"Now," he said, "what do we do about you?"

As the question was apparently addressed more to himself and Tchekoff than to me, I made no reply, but waited for his own suggestions.

"He's all right. He's in it, too. He signed the spirit pass."

This came from Tchekoff. I had already gathered that there was serious trouble of some kind afoot and that it was an additional embarrassment to Rook that I should have stumbled into it, but I had still no idea what was the exact nature of their predicament.

It was true that I had given my signature to the issue of the spirit which had been supplied for driving the Crossleys, but I had done so on Rook's instructions, and it was a shock to learn that because of that I might be implicated.

Rook jumped at Tchekoff's suggestion. He strode up to me, pushing his absurd nose as close to mine as his inches would permit him.

"Tchekoff's right. You're in this, too. As much as any of us. If it leaks out the Cheka'll be after the lot of us and you'd stand a poor chance of getting out of it with your record. So you'll keep your mouth shut about what you've seen—tightly shut, do you hear? And you don't know anything about Bogroff. Have you got that?"

My heart stopped beating at the mention of the Cheka. I nodded acquiescence.

"Well, see you don't forget it. Now get these lorries away and get my car out. You can drive me to Rabinovitch."

Nothing happened during the next two days except that Bogroff was reported sick and a doctor paid several visits to him. Tchekoff told me that Bogroff was very ill but would pull through all right, and that the doctor had been sent by Rabinovitch and would keep his mouth shut. I surmised that the handsome Commissar must also be a party to whatever it was that Rook and his associates had been engaged in. I was scared lest anybody beside myself should have observed Bogroff's arrival, but our offices were at the back of the millionaire's house, and Rook had used a back entrance which he discouraged other drivers from using so that it could be kept clear for emergency purposes, so the incident, as far as I knew, had passed over undetected.

On the afternoon of the third day Rook instructed me to get the Crossleys ready again and to report myself next morning at six o'clock to act as driver. My face must have shown my alarm.

"Somebody's got to take Bogroff's place," he growled, "and you're doing it. Aren't you in this already, up to the neck, the way you've got the wagons ready for us, issued the spirit, and helped us with Bogroff?"

I thought the whole thing over that evening and half into the night without seeing a way out of my difficulty. I considered going to Kisseff, but most likely Rook had long ago obtained a lawful reason for the journeys of the wagons from Rabinovitch and I knew nothing of their real objects. Probably there was also available by this time a good alibi for the condition of Bogroff. Rabinovitch had more power than Kisseff, and if I refused to obey Rook would have me arrested. I decided I had better go and say nothing.

It was dark and bitterly cold when the wagons set off, Rook in the lead, I in the middle, and Tchekoff behind me. I could not

follow the exact route we took, but somewhere on the outskirts of the city we pulled up among a number of warehouses and loaded the wagons each with four large barrels of what I knew to be pure alcohol of the kind that was regularly supplied to us for mixing with kerosene to make our motor-spirit. The barrels were issued on a written order which Rook produced and which, no doubt, contained Rabinovitch's signature. We took breakfast at the warehouse and drove all day through country which was unfamiliar to me. All I knew was that we were driving roughly in the direction of Finland. Progress was slow because the road was bad and frozen.

We put up for the night in a little village near Lake Ladoga and in the morning we made for one of the settlements on the banks of the lake itself. The wagons were halted just outside and I was detailed to stand by them while Rook and Tchekoff went off to one of the cabins. They returned with a fur-clad individual who carefully inspected each barrel and directed them to be rolled into a shed. Inside the shed were more barrels of the same description, some full, some empty. The man in furs then paid over to Rook a sum of money in gold and silver coins and we made our way by the same route back to Petrograd.

I knew now what we were doing. We were smuggling pure alcohol stolen from Bolshevik stores to a point on the Finnish border, where it would be mixed with water and sugar into a tolerable imitation of vodka, to be sold either in Finland or returned by devious routes to Petrograd. Vodka was selling in Russia at that time at a price equal in English money to thirty shillings a half-pint. Now I was in a more difficult quandary than before. Should I tell or should I go on assisting Rook, Rabinovitch, and their gang in robbing the Bolshevik Government? The real point was—supposing I were to tell what I knew, were the Bolsheviks likely to treat me as their own equivalent of King's Evidence or were they not more likely, considering my past record, to lump me in with the others and shoot me too?

Knowing the Cheka as I believed I did, I was inclined to think the safest plan was to hold my tongue. Besides, who was I to carry tales to the Bolshevik authorities? I didn't like Rook and Rabinovitch much. I rather despised them for this particular kind of treachery. Rook had turned out to be just what he seemed, a complete unprincipled buccaneer. But I was not disposed to give anybody away to the Bolsheviks, however much of a rogue I thought him. So far as assisting them further was concerned, I had no doubt that if I tried to draw out now Rook would find it easy enough to get me out of the way. He had only to put a bullet into me and declare he had caught me tampering with his car. Circumstances



The photograph of Zinoviev given to Mr. Blair out of the Russian Secret Police files to assist him in his contra-espionage work against the Bolsheviks in the summer of 1917.

appeared to have me properly trapped and were bent on making a crook out of me whether I would or not. Well, the Cheka took me for a reptile anyhow.

A few days after this first trip I received a note from Commissar Rabinovitch's department officially commending me for services rendered to Commander Rook in assisting him to deliver supplies to the Red Army under conditions of great difficulty and authorizing me to receive one leather jacket, one pair of leather breeches, one pair of new boots, jam, white flour, and butter. I was also handed five roubles by Rook himself. In for a penny, in for a pound apparently—of butter.

I accompanied Rook on about a dozen such excursions, generally two a week, and on each occasion I received a present of money and some extra food rations. The money I was saving carefully with an eye on the day when I might be able to escape.

I was also beginning to make a little bit of a reputation for myself as a car "doctor" and several of the Commissars and bosses had begun sending to me for periodic overhaul cars to which they had taken a fancy and wished to have maintained in good condition. Among these were Zinovieff and Rabinovitch. One day Rabinovitch's car came in, an old Sheffield Simplex armoured car which had been transformed into a kind of sports two-seater. My instructions, conveyed through Rook, were to check everything over as quickly as possible and get the car into tip-top order and supplied with fuel for an abnormally long journey. The amount of motor-spirit required was more than was ever issued for our work, but a proper order was furnished, countersigned by Zinovieff himself. I worked late into the night effecting a repair which was required and reported to Rook that all was ready somewhere around two in the morning. He had evidently been waiting for me to complete the job and said he would deliver the car himself.

During the next morning he asked me to take an order to Rabinovitch for fresh supplies and I grumbled mildly over having had to work half the night on the Commissar's car when I might just as well have completed the work in the morning.

"Mind your own business," he growled, and I concluded he had a liver.

But when I arrived at Rabinovitch's office I was informed that he was absent on state business. I went back to Rook.

"The Commissar must have left early this morning after all," I said.

"What does it matter to you when he leaves?" was the reply. So I left it at that, until three o'clock the following morning, when half a dozen Cheka men hauled me out of bed and drove me off to

that awful building in Gorokhovaya Street to be asked what part I had played in the disappearance of Commissar Rabinovitch and with him one million roubles, the entire contents of the Petrograd Soviet treasury !

Rook and Tchekoff were also arrested but we were interrogated separately. On the way to the Cheka headquarters I kept telling myself that this was the end of all my adventures. I was a little piqued to think that Rabinovitch had got away with it and that for our assistance in his escape he had made us damn ourselves. But that was the way of it and our reward for being small fry. I was kept waiting in a room with a Red guard for about half an hour and then taken before a panel of six interrogators who proceeded to ask me a series of quite simple questions which I had no difficulty in answering concerning Rabinovitch's car and the work I had done to it. Did I know where Rabinovitch was making for ? I did not. I was dismissed. No questions regarding the barrels of alcohol and the trips to the Finnish border ; nothing about my leather suit and the jam and the butter. I was actually sent back to the garage. Neither Rook nor Tchekoff turned up next morning, and by afternoon the garage had a new commander.

I lived for the next week in constant fear of being recalled for further examination but, mercifully, nothing happened. Rabinovitch's embezzlement provided a scandal of the first magnitude in Bolshevik circles. It was the first of its kind and was a rude shock to the good members of the party, but, as far as I know, there was no inquiry made into any of his past activities. Perhaps he had them too well concealed ; perhaps he had too many accomplices. At least, nothing was asked of me. Rook and Tchekoff were transferred to Moscow and I heard nothing more of them. When several weeks had passed and I appeared to have survived my forced association with the knaves of Bolshevik society, I began to feel I could breathe a little more freely. Perhaps there was some life in front of me yet.

CHAPTER II

THE GOOD BOLSHEVIK

WHEN I was released from prison in the middle of October 1918, things were pretty critical for the Bolsheviks. Out of the vast empire which the Tsar had surrendered to the Provisional Government, the only parts remaining under the control of the Bolsheviks were the central provinces based on Moscow and Petrograd themselves.

The Germans were in Finland, Esthonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, White Russia, and the whole of the Ukraine, including the shores of the Black Sea and the Crimea, as far as Rostoff on the Don. Farther to the east, the Cossacks of the Don had established their independence under an Ataman, General Krasnoff, who was receiving German support. Between the Don and the Caucasus mountains a straggling horde of Reds was being driven towards the Caspian Sea by General Denikin, commanding a volunteer force composed largely of former officers and men of the Imperial Army. All Siberia from Vladivostok to the Urals had been lost and was dominated by a mixed force of Czechs, anti-Bolshevik Russians and Siberians of many political shades, Americans, British, and Japanese. Between the Urals and Moscow, the composite anti-Bolshevik forces held all the territory up to the Volga, including the provinces of Orenburg, Samara, and Kazan. The Arctic coast-line was in the hands of another mixed force of British and anti-Bolshevik Russians with bases at Archangel and Murmansk. Attacked simultaneously on the north, east and south, and maintaining a precarious relationship of neither peace nor war with the long German line all down the west, the situation of the Bolsheviks in the centre looked perilous in the extreme.

But the real situation was far worse. Without the Ukraine, without Siberia, what was Bolshevik Russia to do for food? There was grain and other food in Central Russia, but the trouble was to get it in large enough quantities from the peasants who either had only enough for themselves and saw no reason why they should go on short commons to help the people in the towns, or when they did possess surpluses were willing to part with them only in exchange for manufactured goods which the Bolshevik authorities, owing to the failure of industry, could not supply.

I found there were four classes of ration-cards in use when I came

out of prison. In the first category were manual workers whose occupations were a danger to their health. They were the most privileged. Category two comprised the workers engaged in hard but not dangerous physical labour. Category three included all workers with light tasks and housewives, while category four was composed of professional men of all kinds and all those who had formerly lived off unearned incomes and were without work.

I was fortunate. As a prisoner my rations had been somewhat less in quantity and food value than those distributed in category four. As a member of the Red Army not at the front, I was now entitled to rations equal to category two. But everybody, even the aristocrat with the dangerous labour, was hungry. Everybody's preoccupation was with the obtaining of food. Legally it was supposed to be impossible to obtain food outside the limits of one's ration-cards since all food was distributed by the Food Commissariat and private trading was forbidden, but even so early as that first summer and autumn of 1918 the Bolshevik authorities had tacitly recognized that the ration system in itself was far from sufficient and private trading in food was engaged in by all who had anything with which to trade.

Even so, the majority were going hungry, and in the first weeks of my freedom a new fear was manifesting among the city populations, the fear of freezing to death in the winter owing to the equally acute shortage of fuel. It was a tragic dilemma to know what to do with one's dwindling store of possessions—whether to burn them for heat or exchange them for food.

But the amazing thing was that, notwithstanding these privations, there was no more sign to be seen now that I was out of prison that the people of Petrograd were anti-Bolshevik than there had been before I went in. There was, of course, the Cheka to account for part of that. The fumbling instrument which Dzerjinsky had barely founded when I first fell into its hands in less than a year had become an institution of tremendous power which had served Bolshevism well.

Thanks to the Cheka's activities, the men who might have fostered discontent and led it in uprisings against the Bolsheviks had all been removed and were either in prison or under the ground. Those who had survived were too few, too weak, or too afraid. There were other, more beneficent influences at work also. The most active spirits among the workers were either in the Red Army or occupying posts of some importance in the multifarious activities of the regime. Either they believed in the future they were building or were enjoying the new opportunities of work in different spheres, the new importance, which the revolution was bringing them. This goes for the good among them and the bad, the Kisseleffs and the Rabinovitchs, the Blagonravoffs and the Rooks. Moreover, they ascribed their sufferings not to the revolutionary system which they

were being forced to operate, but to the undoubted fact that the new regime was in a state of siege.

Like the peasants who feared the return of the landlords, the workers had no desire to see the old regime of the employers brought back. They were being told to look, and they looked, more or less, to a future when the country would be united, free from war, and the millennium they had been promised would have a chance of coming into being. The less ardent among them, when they gave up the struggle, were going back in considerable numbers to the land from which they or their fathers had come and where the fight to live would presumably be easier. But there were few among them who were willing to lift a finger to have the Bolsheviks overthrown. That hope was apparently being left to the remaining middle and upper classes, the dispossessed and disowned.

Soon after the disappearance of Rook and Bogroff and the appointment of the new commander of the First Army automobile garage, the whole system of transport for the area was reorganized and I found myself called before Commissar Kisseleff again. After paying me a few compliments on the work I had been doing, he announced that he was transferring me to another post. An automobile school was being formed for the army in which officers and men were to undergo several months' training before being sent to the various fronts, and I was to join the staff of this school as a chief inspector of army transport. My job was to be much the same as before—trying to make new cars out of old ones—except that now I should be working in close co-operation with Kisseleff himself and would have a staff of mechanics to assist me. I was rising in the Soviet service.

Under Rook I had seen something of the brigands of Bolshevism ; at the automobile school I learned something more of the better types of men associated with the new experiment. Kisseleff himself was a good example of the members of the Bolshevik Party—or the Communist Party, as they now preferred to be known—through whom Lenin and Trotsky and the other members of the Central Council of Commissars at Moscow were endeavouring to create a new social order out of the revolutionary chaos.

In spite of his highly intellectual appearance, there had been nothing of the intellectual in Kisseleff's birth or upbringing. His father had been a soldier in the Imperial Army, but both his parents had died while he was still an infant, and since none of his relations were willing to adopt the child he had been taken into the choir school attached to his father's regiment where he was trained to be an army musician. He had shown more aptitude for mechanics than music, however, so was transferred to an army machine-shop, and it was there he had been converted to Communism and become

a member of the Social Democratic Party. At the outbreak of the War his politics had been discovered and he had been sent to the front as an infantryman in a Siberian regiment as a punishment. When the revolution started he had come to the fore as an old party member and his political integrity, coupled with some knowledge of mechanics and organizing ability, had won him his present position in the Bolshevik machine.

Apart from the fact that he had never been imprisoned for his convictions, his story and his qualifications were typical of a hundred others who were now occupying posts of responsibility under the new government. Without expert knowledge or administrative experience, but quick to learn, quick to perceive the abilities of the men around him, and with a knack of getting the best out of them by giving them the feeling that he trusted them, there was a quiet strength and assurance about Kisseleff in all his work which never ceased to hold my respect. He was of the select band of Commissars—the Samurai of the party, as Trotsky once described them—to whom their political faith had given a logic as well as a religious zeal, a logic before which, once the initial premises had been accepted, all dilemmas had a habit of crumbling away and leaving the road to be followed standing surprisingly simple and clear.

There was something so un-Russian about this among a people whose capacity for obscuring the simplest of questions in a haze of indecisions and points of view had always been their consuming weakness that it made the men who practised it seem giants among their fellows, and as I watched Kisseleff daily putting it to use I realized more and more that what had given the Bolsheviks the means to power in the welter of conflicting views and opinions into which all Russia had plunged so wholeheartedly after the revolution was that they had been the only people with a plan for everything and the will to carry it into effect.

Kisseleff never tried to proselytize me or any of the non-Communists who were associated with our work. I taxed him once with this apparent neglect of his opportunities of working for his cause.

"You and all the others like you, educated under the capitalist system, have too much to forget," he replied. "If we live five years we shall have several million young men and women who will have grown to maturity under Communism and will know nothing else."

"But to live the five years, isn't it necessary to get as many converts as you can?"

"The only safe converts we can have are those to whom we are able to give something they have never had under capitalism. I wouldn't trust you as a Communist because you've had too much."

"But you trust me enough to use my work?"

"Do I have to teach Karl Marx to my horse?" was the reply.

He worked morning, noon, and night and never sought the least commendation for his efforts or to obtain privileges for himself. He had one desire—to do his best for the new Communist state.

The Petrograd military automobile school aimed at supplying the Red Armies with competent mechanics and engineers in addition to drivers, and the course of instruction included the theoretical as well as the practical. Theory was taught by two other non-Communists, Alexander Yerusalemsky and Paul Kogan, while I put the pupils through their practical course in my workshop.

In addition to the practical work I was doing, both by way of teaching and the actual repairing and reconditioning that was being done in the school's workshops, Kisseleff gave me a roving commission to inspect and report on all the other garages and cars in use in Petrograd for military and government purposes, and in the course of two or three months I had become virtually chief inspector of transport for the whole of the First Red Army. The only garage which remained outside my supervision was that belonging to the Petrograd Cheka.

Bit by bit, thanks mainly to Kisseleff's unremitting energy and enthusiasm, the worst features of the Bolsheviks' treatment of the cars at their disposal were removed. We taught the Commissars and other officials who used them that since the Soviet State was as yet unable to produce cars, those that we had were to be handled with an eye to their future use and not merely to suit the exigencies of the moment. We made the chauffeurs responsible for all breakdowns, even to the point of instituting judicial trials of the worst offenders and sending those guilty of repeated or gross carelessness to the front as members of the Red infantry. Late in the night we held conferences—Kisseleff, Kogan, sometimes Yerusalemsky, and I—on problems which had arisen in the course of the work, matters of reorganization of the school curriculum, when Trotsky, as War Commissar, peremptorily cut the period of training from four months to two in his efforts to speed up the supply of officers for his many armies; answering a supply commissariat questionnaire on the consumption of kerosene by different makes of cars employed for different purposes; devising our own regulations to be obeyed by other departments for this and the other thing.

It was a busy time and I threw myself with a certain bitter zest into it. I was eager to work and I was flattered within myself as my job grew step by step in power and importance in Petrograd. The bitterness came from the poverty of it all, the poverty of seeing people everywhere around one who were consistently under-nourished and whose clothes were wearing out with apparently no prospect of their being replaced with anything new; the progressive deterioration which one could see in the streets and in the appearance of

public and private buildings, while one knew that everything was just as shabby inside ; and the raw weariness that seized one after a day's work patching and contriving when one remembered that there was a world outside this Russia where all this desperate struggle was completely unnecessary because it was actually possible to discard a worn-out thing, whatever it was, and replace it with something new. We were living on a rubbish-dump, second-hand junk dealers raking over the lumber of civilization, sweating our guts out to make miracles out of scrap-iron. That was how it seemed when one permitted oneself to stand back and look at it.

I was still desperately anti-Bolshevik. These Bolsheviks were ragmen in authority, hell-bent on reducing everything and everyone about them to the common level of the dust-heap, even if it meant burying themselves in the ruins, and to my mind the sooner Russia was saved from them the better for everybody.

Eagerly I followed the progress of the relieving armies as it was published in the Bolshevik newspapers. To us prisoners of Bolshevism the signing of the armistice between the Allies and the Germans meant that the Allied nations would now be free to devote their energies to the re-conquest of Russia. We never considered that they might do otherwise. It meant the same for the Bolsheviks. But to them it meant also the annulment of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and the possibility of recovering the Ukraine and the Baltic Provinces again. Lenin's cool logic in buying peace with the Germans had been justified. Trotsky's electric restoration of the morale of the beaten Red Army on the Volga had temporarily arrested the progress of the victorious marchers from Siberia, but Admiral Kolchak had now been acknowledged as Supreme Head of all the interventionist armies and we were hopeful that it would be a matter of a few weeks only before he was rolling Trotsky back towards Moscow. In the south General Denikin finished clearing the Bolsheviks out of the Caucasian territories and was also believed to be preparing to advance on Moscow. Surely the ragmen's rule would have ended with the spring.

But when the spring came the ragmen were still offering as much resistance and had even some triumphs to crow over on their dung-hills. Now that the Germans had gone they had retaken most of the Ukraine and had touched the Black Sea at Odessa. Troops which the French had landed there had taken to the sea again. There were Soviets in Hungary and the Reds had still hopes of Bolshevism in Berlin.

My mood of toleration for my captor-employers passed. I started to look around for some way, however small, by which I could play a part in combating and perhaps overthrowing this new society. I no longer wanted to escape. I wanted to stay on and fight.

CHAPTER III

ONE AGAINST ALL

I HAD barely made up my mind that it was necessary for me to become an active enemy of the Bolsheviks again when I received a big promotion in the Soviet service.

In spite of the hunger and decay which were visible everywhere, there were many intensely busy people in Petrograd. A feverish activity of movement was kept up by everybody who was genuinely working for the new regime and many others who were not. I seem to have read somewhere of a species of ant, one of the large exotic varieties, colonies of whom deliberately dance themselves to death. Sometimes it appeared as if the Communists and their sympathizers were out to cheat hunger and the Whites by the same method of self-destruction. The reason for all this frenzied bustle was partly enthusiasm but chiefly necessity.

With the state as originator, inspirer, and controller of everything that was happening throughout the whole country under Bolshevik dominion, the burden which was falling on the Communists themselves and on those non-Communists who had volunteered or been pressed to help was beyond their power to bear. They had wars in progress on half a dozen different fronts in which ultimately something like five million men were involved. They were wheedling, cajoling, compelling several millions of unwilling peasants to use the land which the revolution had given them to grow enough grain without reward to provide the rest of the population with bread. And they were desperately trying to get enough wheels of industry turning to supply their millions of soldiers with bullets and guns, besides everything else from boots to pocket-handkerchiefs which a modern people requires.

They were endeavouring to evolve a system of education which would teach millions of illiterates to read so that they might know what the turmoil was about. They were operating the biggest propaganda machine the world had ever seen, making thousands of speeches, writing and publishing thousands of papers, posters, leaflets, and tracts—all to explain themselves and their plans and to exhort and encourage to further efforts and further patience those who were willing to be exhorted. And they were running alongside it

the most heavily staffed machine of terror the world had also ever known to suppress and exterminate those who would not. They were even producing plays and operas, making films, and organizing crèches, clubs, and games.

Every item, every detail of this gigantic programme of multiplex activity had to be conceived, discussed, decided, operated, and controlled. Yet in March 1919 the registered membership of the Communist Party was three hundred thousand men and women who had assumed the responsibility of seeing all of this carried to success, and of those probably half were engaged at the front or in underground work in the Russian territories which were outside Bolshevik control. A band of people, half the size of the British Civil Service, had undertaken to direct, manage, and almost perform the entire work of a country at that time ten times the size of the United Kingdom, without previous training or experience in any branch of the work, with the co-operation or assistance of no more than an insignificant minority of those who had formerly held the responsibility and possessed the expert knowledge, working for and through a mass of people who were mostly ignorant of or indifferent to their aims, and under conditions generally which were as far from ideal as they could be, having suffered the strain of the war and the wholesale disruption and dislocation of the revolution itself. They were undertaking all this, moreover, while the country they were seeking to administer was being attacked by enemies on every side and enduring the blockade and hostility of the entire world. That there was famine and decay in Bolshevik Russia should have occasioned no surprise.

These facts were also the cause of the perplexing mixture of activity and inactivity which was characteristic of every department of the regime. On the one hand there was the hectic desire to do, the clamant necessity of getting things to move ; on the other there were a thousand obstacles to doing. Nobody knew quite what or how or where. But all who had the will were falling over one another in their efforts to try, and it was to assist them in their scurry and flurry that I was given my new job.

The cry of all departments was for more cars, motor-cycles, pedal-cycles, anything that would help them in their fight against distance and time ; and since none of those things could be made until the men who were going to see to their making had discussed a hundred plans and made a million bullets and fed a hundred million people besides, they had to be found. For that purpose a Special Confiscation Commission was set up, and one morning I found myself appointed Chairman of the Petrograd Committee of the Commission, greatly to my surprise.

It was hardly the work I was in the mood to perform for the



Dorian Blair examining a list of confiscated cars as Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet Commission for the Confiscation of Motor Transport.

Soviet Government. It meant robbing the dispossessed classes of a few more of their belongings. There were few motor-cars to be taken from the rich ; these had been too difficult to hide. But bicycles and motor-cycles there were in plenty, taken to pieces and concealed, most of them, against the day when they would be sold in the illegal markets for food, or already in the hands of the "bagmen" and speculators who were carrying on a thriving trade. At the same time, it was dangerous for me to refuse and I had the idea that if I undertook the work I might be less hard on the hoarders than somebody else would be, so I took on the job.

There were four of us forming this Petrograd Confiscation Commission, myself as Chairman and technical expert, a representative of the Communist Party, a representative of the Cheka, and a clerk named Kosjinsky who was given to us as secretary. Eugen Lange, the Communist, in pre-revolution days had been chauffeur to a prince. Victor Platonoff, the Cheka man, was Lange's brother-in-law. He was Vice-Chairman of the Commission, and it was the business of both of them to keep an eye on me and see that the work was duly and thoroughly performed. The actual searches were carried out by soldiers who were allotted to us, and it was only on exceptional occasions that any of us accompanied the search-parties. We soon found much more interesting work than poking in cellars and into water-barrels.

One of the duties of the Commission was to collect particulars of the cars and motor-cycles already in the possession of the Commissars and departments and confiscate those which they considered would be more usefully employed elsewhere. This was work after my own heart and I soon found it was enjoyed by Lange. For the first few weeks of our operations we were by far the most-hated organization in Petrograd, not excepting the Cheka. We had every Commissar in the city up before us, defending his right to the possession of his car. I knew most of the cars well, of course, and what they were used for as a result of my work at the Automobile School and with Kisseleff. No doubt it was for that reason I had been appointed.

Even Zinovieff himself, the Bolshevik "boss" of the city, was not immune from our attentions. When he had taken over the control of the Northern Commune after the departure of the government to Moscow he had appropriated for the use of himself and his staff three magnificent Rolls-Royce limousines which had been the property of the Tsar and later of Kerensky. Lange and I decided that he should be made to hand over one of them. There was a row, of course, on a large scale, and we pointed to our mandate which bore the signature of Zinovieff himself. Our difficulty was to know to whom to transfer the car, one of the half-dozen best cars in all

Russia. We offered it to Trotsky himself, but he was in his special train all the time, flying from front to front directing the military operations in his capacity of War Commissar, so the offer was refused. We were in rather a dilemma until I had the happy idea of suggesting that it might be useful to Commissar Bronstein, the Moscow Controller of Supplies, Trotsky's brother. Bronstein accepted the Rolls-Royce with almost indecent alacrity and sent me a letter putting up such a fine case for the car becoming his property that Zinovieff gave way. A week or two later I received from Moscow a nice large stock of white flour and butter which I divided with Lange, and we both considered that the risk of offending the great Commissar Zinovieff had amply been justified.

Lange and I got on very well together, in fact. His brand of Communism suited me. He was no humbug, no piratical masquerader as had been Rook and Rabinovitch. He sincerely believed in the Communist slogans about common ownership of the means of production and distribution, he shall not eat who does not work, the divine right of the proletariat, and so on, and I believe he would have died sooner than see the landlords and the capitalists and the princes back in power. But he distrusted a Commissar only next to a capitalist. It was Lange's profound conviction that a man in office is a man lost, that power of any kind is a drug which sooner or later drives those who eat it demented. He was not an anarchist. He saw clearly that the Communist state must have its officers and governors, but they had to be watched with hawk pertinacity for the first signs of the madness of power appearing in them, and as soon as it manifested itself they must be ruthlessly deposed and even exterminated. No one was immune, so it must be expected that the process would go on unceasingly, government by a succession of human sacrifices. There was a grandeur about Lange's cynicism. It was the disillusionment of an all-wise god, the acceptance of one of the universe's immutable laws. Appoint, watch, strike !

It might have been expected that his philosophy would have made Lange morose and intractable. In point of fact he was cheerful and even pucklike in putting his philosophy into practice. It was his idea to take the Rolls-Royce from Zinovieff—just to shake the fellow up a bit, as he put it. One moment he would be pulling the longest face, lying over my table, earnestly propounding to me his views until one would have thought there could be no owl graver, no Ancient Mariner more doleful, than this youngster. In the next he would be chuckling and slapping me on the back over an idea for a raid which had occurred to him. He was happy for days when we wrested three cars out of the local Cheka's grip. "That'll take them down a peg !" he crowed.

I was uncertain how he would take my offer of a share in the thank-offering I had received from Commissar Bronstein. I had no qualms about accepting the stuff myself. Food was food and I had to live. But Eugen was a Communist.

"Butter? Real butter!" he shouted when I told him what had come for me. "The bastard!"—referring to Bronstein. "What does he think we are?" Then immediately: "Doesn't that prove it, what I've been telling you? Give a man power and he buys favours with the people's butter. Am I to be bought with butter?" His eyes glowed and he burst out laughing. "Am I not!"

"It's so much less for Zinovieff and the other bastards," he told me as we were dividing up the spoils with the appropriate secret ceremony. "Why are we hungry? Because of the difficulties of the economic situation, is it not? Good! And why have we received this bribe of food? Because we have a little power which the proletariat has vested in us. No? Good! And are we better than anyone else? No, of course we're not. We're all alike. We're all human, aren't we? The proletariat should know that. Nobody can be trusted, not even we. It's sad but true."

Eugen was very human, very Russian, and I liked him.

It took longer to get on terms with Platonoff, our Cheka representative. He was a curiously quiet individual, with very pale blue eyes and no expression whatever to his pasty face. At first I was rather nervous of him when he attended the usual morning meetings of the Commission at which the confiscations from Soviet departments were decided. Lange and I did all the talking and arranging. Platonoff stared at the opposite wall and said never a word, even when his opinion was directly requested. At first I was as disconcerted as if a dead man had been occupying a chair at our gatherings. One day, after the third or fourth meeting, he opened his mouth. I had ventured to dissent from some proposals made to us by the superior Commission in Moscow and said that I should not like to do whatever it was.

"If you don't you'll get a bullet," growled Platonoff without removing his eyes from the wall.

I was so surprised to hear him speak that I lost the brusque chairman manner which I had been trying to assume and stumbled:

"But surely it's not so important. Who would shoot me—anybody—for a difference of opinion on a small matter like that?"

Men were being shot in both Red and White Russia at that time who had not opened their mouths. I had misgivings while I spoke.

Platonoff turned his blue eyes full on to mine.

"I would," he said, so gently he might have been shyly volunteering to defend me with his life.

The meeting was rather subdued in tone after that. When Platonoff had left at the end of the meeting, Lange asked me with one of his most boyish smiles if I knew who Platonoff was.

"Who?" I asked.

He grinned broadly.

"He pops them off. He's the Cheka executioner. You saw that revolver in his belt? He does it with that. In the back of the head, when they're not looking. He likes them to be talking to someone else. He can't bear to see their eyes."

I was pretty hardened by that time to the oddities of life in Russia, but for a long time I sat as far away as I could from the silent wall-staring Platonoff. Eventually I got used to his presence and could ignore it. He never spoke again, as far as I remember. What was most curious was that I grew to have a soft sorry feeling for Platonoff, as one might for a corpse that was often in one's company, or for an idiot who was not objectionable but whom one had to see a lot of. There was a kindly side to the puzzle of his soul. When extra rations were doled out Platonoff could always be found in the street distributing his among hungry children. He played among them solemnly, clumsily, without a smile. It is said that Dzerjinsky was also fond of playing with children in his leisure hours. There was an orphanage in Moscow which he visited regularly every week. Needless to say, Platonoff was never invited to share in the illegal rations which Lange and I quite frequently used our position to obtain. That would have been supping with the devil with a very short spoon.

But at last it became obvious in the middle of the summer of 1919 that the job of the Confiscation Commission was drawing to an end. We had collected in all in the Northern Commune from State and other sources nearly two hundred cars, roughly the same number of motor-cycles, and some fifteen hundred push-bikes, which we considered to be not a bad haul. About half of these had been redistributed among different organizations throughout the country and the remainder had been collected in a number of warehouses in Petrograd to be used as a reserve either for civil purposes or for the Red Army.

The one bit of work about which I was pleased was the establishment of this store. It meant so much less mobility for the Soviet services than might have been supplied, but I had been able to defend it on the ground that it was better to have a restricted power of movement today than none at all tomorrow when all the supplies had been lost, destroyed, or worn out, and the plea had been defended in the local Praesidium by none other than our old enemy, Zinovieff himself. I was always hoping that before they came to be



Mr. Blair in a Petrograd street with a motor-cycle he had audaciously taken from the Cheka in his capacity of Chairman of the Petrograd Transport Confiscation Commission.

used something would happen, that the Whites would break through or the Reds would break down, but these hopes were perpetually requiring to be postponed. Kolchak was unfortunately in full retreat now before the Red Army in Siberia, and the army which threatened Petrograd from the Baltic Provinces had been repulsed, but there was better news from the south where General Denikin had just made a big advance, thanks to the irregular peasant forces in the Ukraine which were up in arms against both Reds and Whites, and was actually in Kharkov, only two hundred miles from Moscow. Our hopes of overthrowing the Bolsheviks were now concentrated on him.

It was unfortunate that this advance which Denikin was making should have had a repercussion on the position of the Confiscation Commission. So long as we could hold on to our store of cars we had a reason for being kept in existence, and that was vital both to Lange and myself. It was the source from which we were drawing our rations and a lot of perquisites besides. If it went and the Commission was disbanded there was no knowing what situation we should find ourselves in. The point was that, owing to Denikin's rapid advance, Trotsky had lost a lot of his transport and was howling for cars. Our stock was easily the largest in the country, and in spite of all the strings which we were trying to pull in Petrograd there was little doubt that Trotsky would have his way. Lange was just as desperate to find a way out of the difficulty as I.

What we wanted was a scheme which would leave us in undisputed possession of as many as possible of these cars and bicycles for at least another three months. When I got the idea I was a little frightened of its impudence, but I put it up to Lange and he was delighted with it, so it was formally proposed.

Put roughly in the form in which it was laid before the authorities, it was this. The cars, motor-cycles, and push-cycles which are now in the possession of the Confiscation Commission are those remaining after the best of those collected by the Commission have been distributed for use. None are in first-class condition, many are unreliable, some are unfit for use. If these are handed over to the Red Army in their present condition it is inevitable that many of them will break down, endangering the safety of the soldiers who are relying on them, perhaps permitting them to be captured by the enemy, and in every case because of their general unreliability jeopardizing the success of the operations in which the Red Army is engaged. In these circumstances, it would seem that the Red Army would be safer to have no cars at all than cars on which they cannot rely. The Confiscation Commission demands the right to supply the Red Army with good cars, to be given premises, plant, and workmen, and to be granted the authority to set in hand

at once the urgent State work of overhauling every car, motor-cycle, and push-cycle in its possession and to be relieved of the necessity of supplying the Red Army until it is satisfied that it can supply vehicles on which the Army can implicitly rely.

Lange thought the argument a masterpiece and I was rather pleased with it myself. All the same, I was glad that Kisseleff had been transferred to Moscow. I had a suspicion that his logic would have found in it some flaw. Yet it had the right ring of conscientious earnestness coupled with self-criticism which was so popular in the councils of the Soviets and it meant extra work for the Engineering Committee, the Labour Committee, the Transport Committee, the Workshops Committee, the Light Industries Committee, and heaven knows what other committees besides, with the possibility of further rations and further opportunities of bribery and "blackmail" of one department by another and paper work for all, so there was a fair chance that it would go through.

It did.

Lange and I got on to the job at once. We had a considerable store of flour and jam obtained by our "blackmail" operations and we used this to bribe the officials of the various committees whose co-operation we required. In two days we had our premises, an old repair shop in the Arsenal which had been abandoned and largely dismantled when the Germans were nearing Petrograd in the spring of 1918. There was some machinery there suitable for our purpose and more was obtained by requisition from other engineering shops in the city. Workmen should have been our difficulty since there was the greatest scarcity of skilled workmen in all trades, but we took in anybody we could get. We were desperate to have a start made. In less than a week the shop was at work and in another week there was not a car or a motor-cycle in our store which had not been into the shop and had had at least one vital part removed. It was the speediest work any Soviet institution had yet performed, and I believe the biggest single act of sabotage directed against the Bolsheviks executed outside the actual theatres of the civil war.

When Trotsky telegraphed demanding that all cars which could move should be sent to the southern front at once we could honestly say that there was not a car or cycle in the place which was fit to go.

The first trick was ours. Lange was delighted. The rations of the Confiscation Commission had been saved. I had another motive, however. I had begun my active career as an enemy of the Soviet Government again. I had stopped Trotsky from having the use of any of these cars and motor-cycles in his effort to counteract Denikin's offensive.

CHAPTER IV

“DO YOU REMEMBER VLASSIEFF?”

I WAS determined that as few as possible of these machines would ever be available for Soviet service again. Of course, I had to leave Lange out of this part of the plot.

I was fortunate, however, in requiring no direct accomplices. I had indirect accomplices enough. I have mentioned that there was a dearth of skilled workmen and that in order to get the work begun we had recruited any workmen we could find. Among them we had a leaven of good Bolsheviki, members of the party or sympathizers, at least, who had been allotted to us to act as foremen and help to drive the work through at break-neck speed. They assumed that the first part of their job was to dismantle everything, engines, chassis, wheels and bodies down to their simplest components and I had no intention of hindering or correcting them. Most of our workmen knew just about enough to take things to pieces, and under the energetic supervision of the foremen, who were getting extra rations for their zeal, they set about these cars and cycles as systematically as if they had been told that the Koh-i-noor diamond was hidden in one of the machines somewhere and a fabulous reward was waiting for the one who brought it to light.

The work did not go quickly. Nothing could when the men performing it had been half-starved for a couple of years. But I had no need of haste now—all I wanted was thoroughness, and they were certainly thorough in their work. They even took the balls out of the ball-bearings. I curled up in bed sore with laughter the night after I found them doing that. The gang put in some eight or nine weeks of this frenzied destruction and at the end of it there was not one whole car or cycle in the Arsenal, nothing but mountain after mountain of parts which not a man among them could begin to put together again.

In the meantime Denikin had taken Tsaritsin on the lower reaches of the Volga which had been regarded as the Soviet Verdun. He had recaptured Odessa and had even reached to Kieff. One of his generals, Mamontoff, had penetrated far behind the Red lines, and with a swift-moving column of Cossack cavalry was carrying consternation and destruction into the Soviet's most fruitful grain-growing region around Tamboff. There was some

nervousness among members of the Northern executive who had supported my plea for the overhauling of the cars in defiance of Trotsky's demand to be given them as they stood, and I was being pressed to speed up the work as much as possible. But nobody seemed to have any suspicion as yet that anything untoward had been happening in the Arsenal. I read the Bolshevik newspapers' reports of Denikin's progress with feverish interest. It was essential for my safety that he should reach Moscow before the time came for my unmasking and that my existence should be forgotten in the excitement which the fall of the Bolshevik capital would occasion.

I had tried to safeguard myself a little, however, should it be necessary. Some half-dozen cars, a dozen motor-cycles, and a hundred push-cycles I had saved from our wreckers and passed over to Paul Kogan, my old colleague at the Military School, and arranged that he should be given the job of overhauling these in the repair-shop of the former Russian Baltic works. All the skilled workmen who were sent to me I transferred to him, and there the work was done as efficiently as possible. I had a reserve, therefore, of passable machines from which to draw when a call came in for a car or cycle which it would have been dangerous not to have met. At the same time I provided myself with an alibi in preparation for the attack which sooner or later I should have to meet if Denikin did not succeed. If Kogan's men could do the work it proved there was nothing wrong with my scheme. What was wrong with the Arsenal shop was lack of skill in the men I had been forced to employ. That was to be my line of defence if the worst came and I needed one.

In the two months in which our wrecking gang had been busy Lange and I had engaged in another activity with a view to keeping ourselves in employment and supplementing our rations. This was the foundation of a Northern Commune Workers' and Soldiers' Cycle-Racing Union. The idea had come to us when we were looking around for some use to put the machines which Kogan was taking off the scrap-heap, a use naturally which would keep them under our control, for I have already explained that we were now perfect bureaucrats and simply hated to see any of our finished work leave us in case we should find ourselves without our bread-tickets.

The scheme was to provide outdoor amusement for the masses by organizing cycle and motor-cycle races in Petrograd and other centres. There was a supplementary argument that the racing and practising would provide an opportunity of training new riders for the Red Army, besides assisting generally, of course, in the stimulation of a popular interest in outdoor sports and physical fitness, about which some of the Bolshevik leaders were just then



General Denikin, leader of the South Russian White armies, to aid whom in his efforts to capture Moscow Mr. Blair organized his sabotage of the transport reserves for Trotsky's armies.

beginning to be keen. A new Commission for the Physical Development of the Population had been set up some weeks before with a certain Commissar Gergardze in charge of its activities in the Northern Commune, and Lange and I laid our suggestion before him.

Gergardze had had some sort of medical or scientific training in pre-revolutionary days and was full of charts and tables of the standards of fitness at which a healthy people should aim, but he knew nothing whatever about sport and was completely at a loss to know how to set about organizing it in his domain. He welcomed Lange and me with open arms. It was a marvellous idea, just what he was looking for, he exclaimed. It should be begun at once, and all persons taking part in the races would receive special rations based on Gergardze's calculation of the number of calories required to enable them to make good the amount of energy expended in each race. Science and sport would go hand in hand, and how appropriate it was to the spirit of the new age that we were proposing to achieve physical fitness through the agency of the internal combustion engine ! Lange and I were tickled to death with this new Commissar. He was exactly the kind of fellow we needed.

The first race-meeting was held on a Sunday a fortnight later in the old trotting-racecourse in Semenovsky Square. It had been well advertised throughout the city and among the members of the Army stationed in and around Petrograd, and there was an immense turn-out. We had between thirty and forty entrants for the races and Gergardze himself acted as starter, with Zinovieff and a number of the other big bugs present to lend official lustre to the affair. Lange, Yerusalemsky, Kogan, and I were judges.

It was the first sports meeting that had been seen in Petrograd since the revolution, and even if the whole thing had been a fiasco it is doubtful if the spectators would have cared. They were simply out to get what enjoyment they could. We began with an ordinary push-cycle sprint, followed by a push-cycle race paced by motor-cycles, then motor-cycles alone in different classes, and lastly a grand handicap race in which all entrants, push-cycle and motor-cycle, took part together. The meeting was voted a great success by the spectators and the Soviet officials, and we were instructed to arrange one for every Sunday henceforth. A permanent committee was formed, of which I was chairman and Yerusalemsky vice-chairman, and Gergardze set off hot-foot for Moscow to report. A similar meeting was held in Moscow a week or two later, and before the summer was out these weekly race-meetings had been started in almost all the major towns under Bolshevik control.

But if they were a success with the public they were a still bigger success with the riders, and it was in this connection that I was

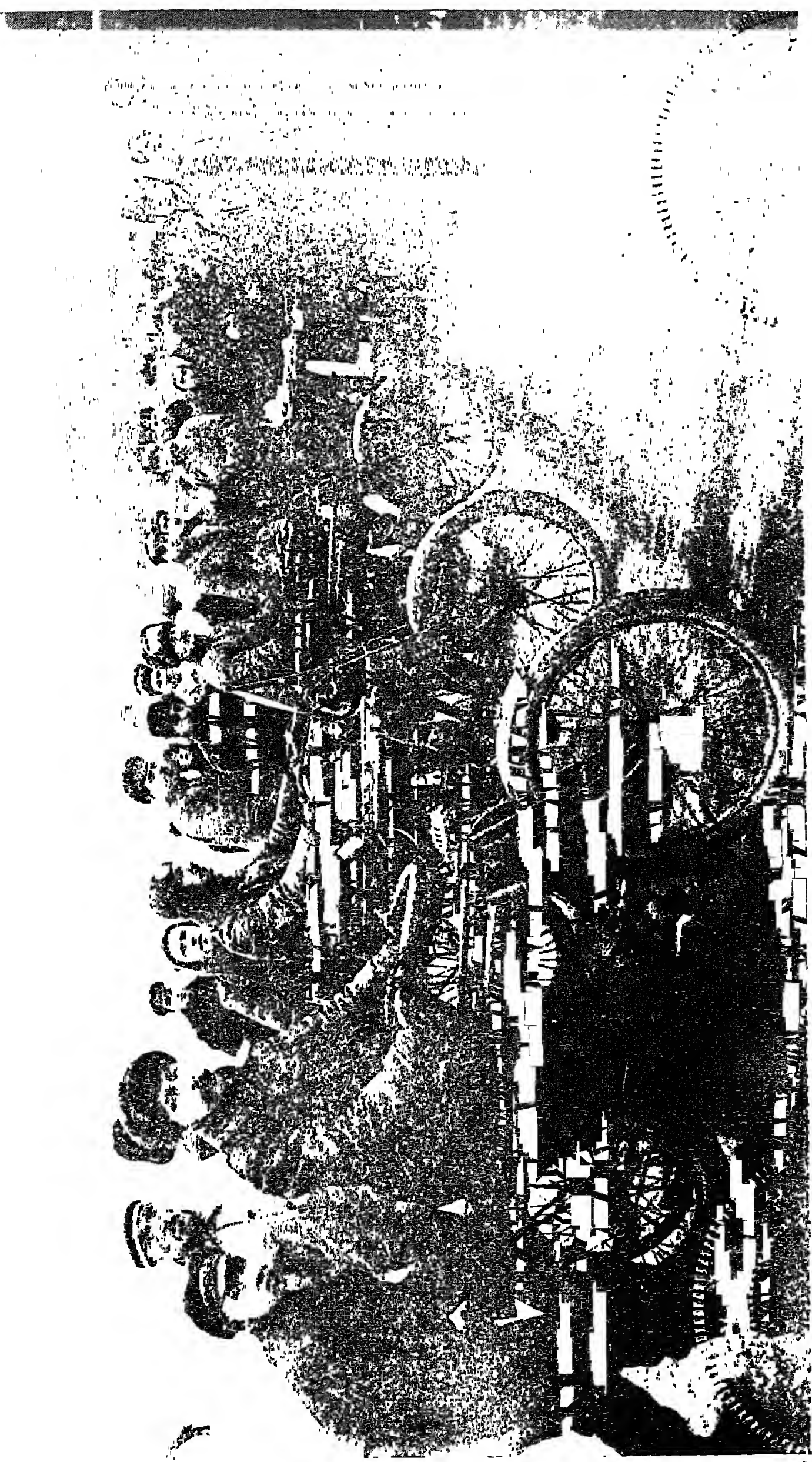
specially pleased. Lange and I had saved our machines ; we were given an official permit to retain as many as we thought we should need. But the greatest prize of our stratagem was the food it brought, and I set myself to see that as much of this as possible should go where it was most needed in my opinion—for distribution among the members of the professional and bourgeois classes who were enjoying only the starvation rations of the third and fourth degree.

Selection of the entrants for the races was in the hands of Yerusalemsky and myself, and we let it be known among our friends, and they in turn among theirs, that if the dispossessed came forward their claims would not go unheard. We were empowered to lend out cycles for practice under certain conditions, and when the hungry discovered what was happening there was a stampede to learn to ride. In addition to the rations provided for every rider under Gergardze's calory system, the prizes for each race were parcels of food. If a man won a succession of races he became entitled to a silver medal, but it was noticeable that there was no particular enthusiasm about the winning of these. The only thing our friends cared about was the extra food. Occasionally I entered for a race myself and was invariably permitted to win, no matter how badly I rode. Our racers would not have offended their fairy godfather chairman for the world.

I felt there was something moving, therefore, in my personal campaign of obstructing the Bolsheviks.

My own rations I was drawing from a number of sources—as Chairman of the Confiscation Commission, as Chairman of the Cycle-Racing Committee of the Commission for Physical Development, as supervisor of the automobile and cycle repair works at the Arsenal, and as technical adviser to the garages of the First Red Army, a post I had retained although I no longer performed any duties in connection with it. I had no compunction whatever about taking food wherever I could get it. It was the "racket" of the day. Everybody was doing it who had any means of establishing a claim anywhere, whether he was a Communist or a non-Communist, only the most rigidly moral of the community refraining from the struggle to extend their ration privileges.

The number of my ration-tickets was the measure of my success in this new society. I suppose I was really a big noise in Petrograd. I had to employ a man with a motor-cycle and sidecar to go the round of my various posts each day and collect my rations for me, paying him a portion of what he collected. But when I had eaten all of it I was still often hungry. Bread, frozen potatoes, half-rotten fish, a morsel of horseflesh occasionally, sometimes a little sugar or tea as a special reward for some activity—it was not



Motor-cyclists lined up for a race at the First Meeting of the Auto Racing Club, which Mr. Blair organized for the first Bolshevik Physical Culture Commission in an effort to "wangle" rations for starving members of the professional classes.

remarkable that even the good Communists were not above a little gentle racketeering. We were a pack of famished cats competing with one another for the pickings of a workhouse dust-bin.

I had one more claim to a bread-ticket to which I have not referred. I was also on the ration-roll of the Commissar of the Theatres of the Northern Commune, Madame Andreyva, wife of Maxim Gorky. I had "blackmailed" my way on to that roll and stayed because they liked me. It came about this way.

One day, in the early period of the Confiscation Commission, while Lange and I were just beginning to realize the opportunities of our position, two women called at our offices and asked to see the Chairman of the Commission. I had seen them arrive from the window, the two on one bicycle, a man's, one riding, the other standing behind her on the back-step. They were obviously unused to that method of locomotion for they came wobbling down the street like the entry on to a stage of a couple of knockabout comedians and collapsed in a heap when they tried to stop at our door-way. I had them in. One had dark hair, close-cropped like a man's, and wore a soldier's uniform jacket above a skirt and a pair of military leggings. The mannish type of woman was new to me and I was still grinning broadly when she entered, for I had been watching her rolling in the gutter. She came in now with a swagger which was probably intended to compensate for the undignified figure she had just been cutting, but succeeded better in perpetuating its memory. She strode right up to the desk where I had taken my seat and, ignoring completely my oafish amazement, looked me over with a beetling frown and demanded :

"Aren't you much too young to be the Chairman of this Confiscation Commission ?"

I knew my answers, and swallowing the grin and substituting for it a grim expression which I hoped was as black as hers, replied that age was not a requisite of office in the service of the Workers' Government.

"Are you a Communist ?" was her next volley, roared at me in a throaty bark, her hand on my desk and her face pushing forward to cow me.

"The executive of the Petrograd Soviet is quite satisfied with my credentials," I replied.

"Well, I am," came the answer, "and I want bicycles !"

"You'll have to tell me what you want them for then, Comrade," I retorted.

"For the workers' art !" was the grand reply which seemed to assume that I should rise and bow to it.

Everything was being done in the workers' name in those days,

and I was well aware that art was also being dragged by the neck and made to dance in this scruffy proletarian Bacchanal, but I was puzzled to see what it might have to do with my bicycles and said so.

The short-haired fury's mouth opened and the balls of her eyes stared so wide that I thought she was about to throw a fit, but she recovered herself and spat at me :

"You filthy bourgeois swine ! You worm your way into positions of power pretending to serve the workers so that you can save your own pampered skin by stealing the workers' bread ! What do you know about art ? All you know is the hireling art of the capitalists ! Pah ! A new world is being born. We artists are its teachers, its planners, its inspirers. We shall turn men who once crawled on the ground in Russia into gods that shall be seen with envy from every corner of the earth, and you have the effrontery, the unspeakable impertinence to ask me what we want with bicycles ! Bicycles ! Are we to be smothered with bureaucracy as we were under the old regime ? Are we to be made to walk when the workers have made us free to fly ? Oh, you——"

I have no idea how I was to be further denounced or apostrophized because she suddenly interrupted herself in full cry and with a peremptory "Wait here, I shall return !" thrown to her companion, strode out of the room.

I went to the window to see her go off, and by the mercy of God or her own virtuous indignation she mounted her cycle with fair success and was able to wobble away down the street, taking her wrath with her unimpaired.

I was left rather speechless by this whirlwind departure and turned to face the companion she had left behind her, half ready for another onslaught, half plucking up my courage to tell her to get out as I had work to do. She had stayed back in the darkest corner of the room while the other was shouting at me and I had scarcely observed her. Now she came forward.

She had no hat on, no cloak, just a blouse and skirt. There was nothing in her hands, and she held them, one clasping the other down in front of her in an attitude so childish, wistful almost, that I stared at her in alarm. She was like a naughty little girl who had come to thwart anger with a face full of tears. The contrast between this humility, a little ridiculous in a grown woman, and the coarse arrogance of the one who had just rushed out was wildly grotesque. But she must have seen from my face that she had got the effect she wanted, for she threw back her head and laughed.

"You funny man," she tinkled. "How could you think I was going to bite you when I was only asking you not to bite me ? Don't you mind Morosova. She just barks. She doesn't bite. She'll

be back soon. Meanwhile, is there somewhere where I could sit down? Standing on that bicycle hurts my foot.”

She was of medium height, very fair, with abnormally large blue eyes, a straight nose and a wide, full-lipped mouth. It was impossible not to be impressed with those eyes of hers. They were so honest, so alive, so eager to catch and respond to laughter or seriousness, to match with whatever was uppermost in the feelings of those surrounding her. They gave her a vitality which was infectious. One felt keener, more intense, just by looking at her, working to give her those cues she was looking for to see the immediate glowing response that came from her. I came to know later that the eyes were a deception, that their responsiveness was not so absolute as it seemed, that they were playing a part, they were a lure. But in my room at the Confiscation Commission, when I first had the chance to look at her, I was aware of nothing but those extraordinarily large eyes searching my face so earnestly to see how I was going to take her joke, how I was going to respond to her.

I gave her my chair (they were not supplied for visitors to most Soviet offices in those days) and tried to accommodate myself to the unaccustomed sight of somebody who could laugh so freely and spontaneously under the conditions of the Soviet regime.

“Tell me,” I asked nervously, “who is this Comrade Morosova and what does she want? Why did she run away like that and where has she gone?”

She laughed gaily.

“Oh, she’s always like that. She doesn’t mean it. You don’t need to worry about her. She’s gone to bring Andreyva to see you, I expect, to talk to you about the new art. But she’s nice, Andreyva. You’ll like her. She wants bicycles. We came to get them.”

“But who,” I asked, “is Andreyva?”

“Don’t you know? She’s the Commissar for the Theatres. We’re helping her. Morosova paints scenery and I act. Would you like to act? I think you could. You’re awfully good-looking.”

I ignored this and asked what the Commissar of the Theatres wanted with bicycles.

“To go about on, of course. We’ve a fearful lot of work to do and we go everywhere. Do say you can give us them, just a few. It’s terribly important.”

I fenced a little with some sentences about the urgent work for which all kinds of transport were desperately needed and threw a flavour of heavy Marx into them.

She became very serious.

“Oh, I quite agree. But Andreyva says there is nothing more

important than teaching the people the new ideas through our work. It's propaganda really. We're terribly ideological."

Kosjinsky, our secretary, came in just then to ask me to the telephone and I found myself speaking to Andreyva herself. The irate Morosova had got back without mishap, apparently. I arranged to call on Madame Andreyva to hear the case for the bicycles and returned to tell my visitor. She was delighted.

"Then that's settled," she trilled. "I'm so glad. Andreyva will convince you. She's very serious."

She had said good-bye and was going out when she turned again. Her big, eager eyes looked up appealingly into my face.

"I think we're very deserving, all of us," she said very solemnly. "You haven't got any jam, have you?"

I ran the risk of being shot for being in possession of illegal stores if she had turned out to be a Cheka spy, but I did have some jam which Lange and I had come by in our unlawful occasions, and I produced some of it for her. She ate it on the spot, supping it out of the jar with a pen-holder. I was on edge in case we should have an unexpected visit from Platonoff, our silent Cheka colleague. He would have shot both of us in his righteous indignation without flinching. When she went she kissed me without warning.

"For the jam," she said.

This meeting brought me into contact with a bunch of people whom I liked immensely and who liked me. They were probably the only people in all Russia whom the revolution had not hardened or embittered. They were the younger people of the theatre, writers, actors, designers, dancers, whom the energetic Madame Andreyva had gathered around her in an effort to win the arts for the proletariat or the proletariat for the arts. Nobody was quite certain as far as I could gather which of these two aims they were really following, but nobody cared very much. The important thing was the work.

Andreyva was a queen among women. Of middle age, she was tall, almost statuesque in build, with features of the classic mould crowned by magnificent wavy copper-coloured hair. Her eyes were green, set in a parchment-coloured face to which a few rather prominent freckles gave the necessary human touch, and her hands were the most beautifully expressive I have seen. She was an actress herself and showed it in every movement, but she never posed. She and her husband, Maxim Gorki, were the social and cultural leaders of the revolution, its host and hostess, as it were. She received me over the matter of the bicycles as if she were the empress of a great country negotiating a treaty with the king of a neighbouring state. When our business was over she introduced me to Dora Stroewa, her right hand in her work, and her secretary, a former

lawyer named Chulkoff, who prepared the papers I needed for the transfer.

It was all done with a tact and an air which I had encountered nowhere else among Bolsheviks (she was a member of the party), and when she ended the interview with an invitation to me to join a committee she was forming to start a Theatre of Foreign Comedy in Petrograd, to help with the selection of plays and in making translations, I was flattered to the core. I even forgot for the moment that it meant another ration-roll, nor was I struck immediately by the incongruity of importing foreign laughs while a world blockade was starving our potential audiences. I was just delighted to be among a human crowd again, people who could laugh.

Our theatre was the Troitsky, and I spent all the time there I could spare from the Arsenal and the Sports Committee. When rehearsals were over—there was a ration dole at every rehearsal—we would repair to the flat of Maximoff, one of our leading actors, the John Barrymore of Russia, to eat our rations and have a party. Andreyva had already begun to send out travelling troupes of actors and actresses to entertain the smaller towns in the provinces, and when one of these returned there was always a grand night because they brought back with them eggs and butter and other things impossible to obtain in Petrograd. I had found romance, too, with Irma, the girl who had eaten the jam off my penholder. We had a room in an old house round the corner from Maximoff and were deliriously happy. She followed me around with her large, expectant eyes, pleading to serve me.

One evening, at Maximoff's, an actor called Larsky took me aside.

“Don't be alarmed,” he said. “I've got a greeting to give you from an old friend of yours. He'll be coming to see you shortly. Do you remember Vlassieff?”

Did I remember Vlassieff!

“How . . . Where . . . ?” I asked.

“It's all right,” he whispered. “He asked me to show you this.”

He took out of his pocket a small charm which Vlassieff had worn on his watch-chain. I had often admired it, coveted it, in fact, which Vlassieff knew. It was the best token he could have sent me.

“But where is he? What has happened to him? Where can I see him?”

He smiled at my eagerness.

“He's in Moscow at the moment. You've got a big job on working for the Soviets.” He winked scarcely perceptibly when he said this. “He thinks he may be able to help you with it. But you mustn't be surprised when you see him. He has changed a lot since you knew him. That's why he asked me to prepare you.”

I suddenly discovered I had lost my appetite—even for real butter.

CHAPTER V

THE GRAND PLOT TO BRING PETROGRAD TO A STANDSTILL

Vlassieff arrived under wildly dramatic circumstances. In the second week of October 1919 Petrograd was plunged into a ferment. Denikin had been pushing his advance nearer and nearer to Moscow throughout the autumn and now only something like one hundred and fifty miles separated him from the seat of the Bolshevik Government. The position of the Reds was more perilous than it had been at any time since the revolution began because, although they had driven Admiral Kolchak well back into Siberia, the forces engaged there could not be withdrawn, for Kolchak's forces were still intact and would at once have advanced to menace Moscow again from the other side.

This was the ripe moment chosen by General Yudenitch, commander of a White force which had been operating in a mild fashion on the borders of Latvia and Esthonia, to make a desperate bid to capture Petrograd. Esthonia and Latvia had both been at war with the Soviets, but the Esthonians had a mission in Petrograd engaged in framing peace, and it was with a view to preventing this at all costs that Yudenitch was launching his attack. But the time could not have been better chosen for a master-stroke which, if it succeeded, would rock Bolshevism to its foundations and give Denikin his opportunity to push in and deliver the finishing blow at its heart.

The attack began on October 11, when Yudenitch's army took Yamburg on the Esthonian frontier and started down the railroad which led straight to Petrograd, a hundred miles away. I had arrived early at my office on October 12 and was reading the news of this surprise offensive in a Bolshevik paper while waiting for Lange and Platonoff to come in for a meeting of the Confiscation Commission, when Kosjinsky came in to inform me that a special emissary from Moscow was waiting to see me outside. In strode a short, stocky fellow dressed from cap to boots in the leather uniform which only the paladins of the revolution wore, and announced in a rolling voice that he was Comrade Vlassieff, plenipotentiary of Commissar Bronstein, head of the Sovnarkom, the Commissariat of People's Property, sent from Moscow on important confidential

business. I asked Kosjinsky to leave, and when the door had closed turned to greet my old comrade of the Counter-Espionage.

He cut short my questions about himself.

"Quick, before your colleagues arrive. I know you have a meeting this morning. I asked your secretary. There's big business to do. You've read about Yudenitch in the papers. Well, we're here to help him. You've still got those cars tied up in your fancy factory?"

"Yes, but how did you know——"

"Never mind. It was good work. Rak likes you for it."

"Rak ! Is he——"

"Head of the Operative Department of the Cheka in Moscow."

"Good God !"

"It's fine ! We've nearly got the old crowd together again. We'll have the blighters on the run soon now. We've been keeping an eye on you, and when we discovered what you were working at on your own—but never mind that now. My boss on this job is a Comrade Etinger. He's a big bug under Bronstein but he's one of us, and when he comes here in a minute or two to see the Confiscation Commission—he's with Zinovieff at the moment getting the O.K. there—you're to do everything he tells you and pretend you know nothing about him. See?"

"But what are you going to do?"

"Immobilize the Red Army. Confiscate all the petrol in Petrograd."

"But you'll never——"

"We will. It'll be official."

"Does Zinovieff know——"

"He thinks it's an inventory being made for Bronstein. But Etinger's got the seals, and once we've got them on nobody can take them off but Moscow. And Etinger won't be here or in Moscow. He'll be lost on the road somewhere. And by the time they've sorted out the tangle Yudenitch'll be at the gates of Petrograd."

I thought the scheme might work. Owing to the increasing shortage of petrol all supplies which could be spared had been called in from the Seventh Army which was blocking Yudenitch's route. Nobody had expected that it would find itself in action now that peace negotiations with Esthonia were going on. There was a perilous shortage of railway rolling stock in the district, too. If Yudenitch were driving the Seventh Army back, Petrograd would be powerless to send forces to its help.

Vlassieff had barely made the scheme clear when Comrade Etinger bustled in. Lange and Platonoff were with him. They had met outside. Etinger was a thin, nervous-looking fellow with dark,

brushed-back hair and a little black beard. There was a touch of the dandy in his dress, smartly-cut military riding-breeches and a suède leather jacket, and he had a revolver on either hip. He got down to business right away, Vlassieff standing deferentially by his side. I could see that Lange and Platonoff were both impressed. While he was talking Zinovieff's office came on the telephone, instructing the Commission to place itself entirely in Comrade Etinger's hands.

When the mission had been explained—Etinger's story was that he had been sent by Bronstein to check up on the supplies of motor fuel and that all supplies regarded by him as not being immediately necessary were to be held by us as trustees for Bronstein's Sovnarkom—we all filed out together and set off in a big *Mercédès* which they had brought with them from Moscow, Vlassieff at the wheel. Our first stop was at the army headquarters, where Etinger left for a time and returned with a representative of the general staff who crushed in beside us. Then began a tour of all stores. Lange had our list of the departments, civil and military, and all individuals entitled to use cars, and each was visited, Etinger demanding to see the fuel ration books and the amount in hand, and in every case the cans and barrels were sealed and stamped with the seal of the Council of Commissars, of which Lenin himself was president, the highest executive authority in the land.

Lange and Platonoff were visibly puzzled by this repeated operation, as were the people in charge of the stores, because it meant quite obviously that not a car would be able to move until the seals were removed, but nobody could question Etinger's right. He had the seal of the Commissars in his hand. We worked till late at night, visiting every depot as far as Gatchina, thirty miles away.

Returning to Petrograd, our next visit was to the Arsenal workshops, where Etinger selected several truck-loads of the junk there, including several cars which my men had begun to assemble but which were incomplete, and ordered these to be despatched first thing next morning to the Seventh Army front. They would be absolutely useless there. I suppose it was a final act of annoyance or another bit of dislocation, a trick to get as much as possible of the stuff out of the way. He then commandeered a special locomotive and coach to take him back to Moscow, had his *Mercédès* car loaded on to it, and with a hand-shake all round went away, leaving poor Lange and Platonoff completely bemused and dead tired but tremendously impressed with the industry and efficiency of this powerful comrade from Moscow. Vlassieff remained.

Next day Petrograd began to wake up to the situation. The discovery was made gradually as car after car went to have its

tank replenished and found the store sealed up. There was racing around and ringing of telephones to find where supplies could be obtained. Slowly it began to dawn on everybody that there was no petrol anywhere which could be used. The city was hamstrung. Not a car could be moved. The military were ringing up Zinovieff. Zinovieff was ringing up the Cheka. The Cheka rang up the Confiscation Commission. The Confiscation Commission appealed to Comrade Vlassieff. Comrade Vlassieff declared that he had no authority to do anything without Comrade Etinger's instructions. Zinovieff wired to Moscow. Moscow knew nothing without Comrade Etinger. Comrade Etinger had vanished into thin air.

And Yudenitch was carrying all before him. The Seventh Army was retreating pell-mell to Petrograd. It took two days for the order to come from Moscow to unseal the cans, and by that time it was too late to be of any use.

The demoralization of the Seventh Army was completed by the appearance among Yudenitch's troops of tanks supplied to them by the British Government. It was the first time tanks had been used in the civil wars and their effect was as devastating as had been Hannibal's elephants. There were other wreckers besides ourselves at work on the Soviet side, too. Staff officers of the Red Army had simply delivered their men into Yudenitch's hands. Within the week the men of the Seventh Army had poured back in a continuous retreat into the suburbs of Petrograd and Yudenitch's main force of 20,000 men was in Gatchina, one day's forced march away.

Zinovieff's two Rolls-Royces, now tanked up with spirit, stood ready to take him out of danger. Commissars were rushing about preparing for flight. Hourly the order was expected from Moscow for a wholesale evacuation since it was known that troops could not be spared from Denikin's advancing path. The whisper was that Lenin had declared Petrograd must be allowed to fall. Only the workers of the city were for defending it.

Then out of the blue came a telegram, from a train speeding from Moscow to Petrograd :

Petrograd must be defended [it ran]. Bursting into this gigantic city the Whites will come into a stone labyrinth, where every house will be for them either a riddle or a threat or a mortal danger. Where can they expect a blow? From the window? From the attic? From the cellar? From around the corner? Everywhere. At our disposition are rifles, machine-guns, hand-grenades. We can cover some streets with barbed-wire entanglements, leave others open and turn them into traps. It is only necessary that some thousands of men should firmly decide not to give up Petrograd.

It was Trotsky, racing to save the city, thinking aloud, forming his plans, flashing his thoughts ahead of him like clarion trumpet-calls, commanding, advising, exhorting, galvanizing the waverers into action, spurring them with the ruthless energy of his own determination.

The workers of Petrograd cheered. The Commissars rushed back. Had they not defended Petrograd before against Kerensky, and under Trotsky? There was a hurried issue of arms and a wild rush for the barricades.

The defence of Petrograd against Yudenitch was a personal triumph for Trotsky. The half-empty city, which for the last two years had been slowly dying of a wasting disease, seemed to be filled with the electricity of his presence. He was everywhere. He made a whirlwind visit to our Arsenal works, gave one withering look at the piles of useless parts which once had been cars, and lashed with a flow of blistering invective the men who had permitted the destruction. He ignored me completely. I had expected to be shot on the spot. He was desperately determined to produce something on wheels which would look like Yudenitch's tanks. But the street-fighting which he was preparing for was not required. Yudenitch was halted where Kerensky had been almost exactly four years before, on the Pulkavo heights just outside the town. There was only one possibility now, a siege. But for that Yudenitch had not the men. He retired to Gatchina, hopeful that his presence there would inspire some kind of insurrection in the city.

Trotsky's repulse of Yudenitch was a terrible disappointment to those of us who had hoped that with his approach victory over Bolshevism was in sight. There was still a faint chance, however, and we had one last fling to help. Yudenitch's army could not be left at Gatchina; if Petrograd was to feel safe it had to be destroyed. An order was issued to the Confiscation Commission to load up a train with fifty cars to be selected from whatever non-military garages we chose and to despatch these to the Fifteenth Red Army which Trotsky was bringing up from the south to cut off Yudenitch's line of retreat. Everything was to be loaded ready, and the moment Yudenitch was driven out of Gatchina, thus freeing the railroad junction to Luga, where the Fifteenth Army was, the train could go. I was determined that the train would not leave if I could help it.

The plan came to me while I was supervising the loading of the cars. In the same goods yard was another train which was being loaded with furniture, antique stuff mostly which must have been taken from the former rich houses of Petrograd, and cases which I learned contained china and gold and silver plate. I made some inquiries and was told that this stuff had been purchased from the

Soviets by members of the Esthonian Mission which had come to Petrograd to negotiate peace before Yudenitch attacked. It was being sent abroad by them into Finland, and when the peace treaty had been signed they would pay for it with several train-loads of food. I also learned that when the loading was completed the wagons were to be padlocked and made fast against unauthorized intruders with the diplomatic seals of the Mission. The man who told me all this was attached to the Mission and it was he who was to be responsible for fixing the seals.

It was much too risky for me to carry out the plan myself, but I told my idea to Vlassieff, who agreed to undertake the job with the assistance of another former Counter-Espionage man named Bruni. When the Esthonian went to affix his seals they waylaid him, knocked him out, took his place as seal-fixers, and carefully sealed the wrong train. Soon afterwards the train-load of antique furniture went off to Luga to the Fifteenth Army, whose confidence in Trotsky must have been sadly shaken when they undid the wagon-doors and found Louis Quinze chairs and bedsteads instead of the cars they had expected, while the internationally famous antique dealer who had travelled from America to meet the treasure train in Finland must have used some pretty old-fashioned language when he undid the diplomatic seals and found his cargo of old iron.

So disorganized was Bolshevik rail transport generally, and especially during the upset which had just been taking place around Petrograd, that this exploit might have gone down in the records merely as another mistake of the railway officials, but for the tender-heartedness of Vlassieff and Bruni in dealing with the Esthonian. They had left him locked up in a shed after knocking him unconscious. When the job was done they returned to the shed to restore the sealing equipment to his possession. This was according to plan. They had given him a whiff of chloroform which Bruni had collected somewhere. As it happened, the trains were pulled out so quickly after the sealing was done that they were gone before the Esthonian recovered consciousness, and the poor man was so scared that he said nothing about the incident until the Cheka inquiry compelled him to relate what had happened to him. Even so, the whole exploit was put down to the machinations of unknown White agents, and that might have been the end of it so far as we were concerned, but for a stupid act by Bruni. To make the Esthonian believe he had been attacked by robbers, Bruni had taken away the man's watch.

Unable to resist the opportunity of obtaining some delicacy which he would not otherwise have been able to afford, he bartered away the Esthonian's watch in one of the illegal food markets to a "bagman" he knew. The watch fell into the hands of the Cheka,

who had chosen that very day to make one of their periodic raids. And the "bag-man" was sent out again with a Cheka guard to find Bruni and bring him in. They came on him walking in a street near his home. The terrified "bag-man" screamed out his recognition while they were still many yards away, and Bruni, grasping the situation in a flash, took to his heels in the opposite direction.

He made for a thickly wooded park near-by and climbed a tree, lying flat along one of the bare branches. The Cheka soldiers blundered through the wood below him and passed out of sight. He was waiting until the coast would seem clear enough for him to venture down when an old woman came through the trees and, lifting up her skirts, proceeded to relieve herself under the branch on which Bruni lay. Bruni was a born imp of mischief and presumably this was a chance he could not bear to let by. He called down to her. Caught in the act, the old woman looked up and yelled at the top of her voice. A Cheka man ran back, saw Bruni on the branch, and brought him crashing to the ground with a bullet through his brain.

I learned of Bruni's death and the way it had happened from a Cheka officer who came to enlist me in the search for Vlassieff, whom they had also succeeded in getting on the run. Etinger had been caught in Moscow and was already dead. Now they wanted Vlassieff to question him regarding his share in the sealing of the petrol stores. Only one thing was saving me from suspicion of complicity in all this. When all the cars in Petrograd had been at a standstill for lack of fuel, the chief of the Transport Cheka had demanded to know whether the Confiscation Commission had any spirit unsealed, and with an eye to future favours I had found him some. I was also covered by the explicit instructions to give every possible assistance to Etinger which I had received from Zinovieff. Nevertheless, it was still touch and go whether I should be implicated in either the petrol or the train plot, and I was holding my breath.

I swallowed it altogether with a gulp when I discovered where I was being taken to identify Vlassieff, should they be lucky enough to catch him. I had visited my old flat in Tavritcheskaya Street only once since the night of my arrest there by the Cheka nearly two years ago. It was when I had been looking for a place to take up residence with Irma. The whole block was deserted, almost a ruin. Apparently it had been one of the many such blocks in Petrograd, left without fuel in the previous winter, in which the water-pipes had frozen. In the spring they had burst with the thaw, flooding every floor, and the inhabitants had simply removed themselves and their belongings elsewhere.

Petrograd was a deserted city compared with what it had been in pre-revolution days. Nearly half the population had vanished, some abroad, some into prison, most of them into the country districts where food was easier to obtain. Consequently there was plenty of room for everybody who remained and it was possible to move into another house, while it was impossible to have the old one repaired. There were dozens and dozens of these deserted dwellings in the city. In some the floors had begun to fall in. I had been unable to discover the condition of my own flat inside because I found the Cheka seals, placed there after my arrest, still on the doors. But this was the place which, unknown to me, Vlassieff had chosen for his hiding-place.

We were met at the door by some more Cheka men. We were too late. The bird had got away again. Routine demanded that the place must be searched, however, and I stood by while the operation was performed. I looked round at the destruction the broken pipes had caused. The carpets were a rotting mess. In one room the weight of water above had brought the ceiling down and a plaster ruin lay beneath the gaping hole. Paper was peeling off the walls. Systematically the searchers combed the debris in case Vlassieff should have left anything behind him. My old desk was smashed open with a rifle-butt. I trembled lest anything with my name on it should come to light, and I almost died of fright when a water-warped drawer, opening with a jerk, scattered a heap of things on the floor and sent a snapshot photograph of myself right to my feet. Quick as lightning I stooped and, pretending to pick the scattered things up, pushed the photograph through a hole in the carpet. I blessed my luck that the floor underneath the carpet had already been examined.

I never saw Vlassieff again. Our exploit with the automobile train may have helped a little in facilitating Yudenitch's retreat, but it was of no avail in hindering the recovery of the Red armies. Yudenitch was driven back almost as swiftly as he had come, and saved his forces from annihilation only by crossing over into Esthonia, where they were disarmed and interned. Simultaneously with the repulse of Yudenitch outside Petrograd, Moscow had been saved from Denikin when the Reds struck desperately back and recaptured the town of Orel. By the middle of November Denikin was in retreat. A few days later there was jubilation in Petrograd. The Red troops in Siberia had taken Kolchak's capital, Omsk, and the Admiral, the supreme ruler of all the White armies, was reported to be in flight. Hope of rescue from outside burned itself out among the dispossessed in Soviet Russia in that final hectic month in the winter of 1919. All that we could do now was to wait for the collapse of Bolshevism from within. Surely it could not long be delayed.

CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN OF NATASHA

NATURALLY, there were inquests into the fiasco of the repair works at the Arsenal. The Petrograd Praesidium could not have been expected to take the dressing-down they had received from Trotsky without attempting to pass it down the line and find a culprit, and as the originator of the scheme I went up first to bear the brunt of the onslaught. I had my alibi ready, however, in the good work which was being turned out so steadily under the supervision of Kogan and was able to prove my case with it. There was nothing wrong with the scheme. The fault lay with the men who had been available to do the work for me. Since the directors of every Soviet works enterprise which was breaking down—and there were few that were not, with the exception of the army—were making the same complaint, there was nothing new for the Commissars to swallow in this and it duly went to swell the dossier of their own voluminous complaints and explanations for their shortcomings to Moscow. A special committee of inspection visited the workshop. All Communists and sympathizers who had no other claim to be retained were ruthlessly turned out, and with a much smaller but considerably more competent staff, chiefly of former bourgeois technicians of different kinds, I was set to put what cars and cycles I could into commission again.

I was thankful to have come so well out of a difficult situation and determined to lie low for the time being and carry on with my job.

In spite of the intense cold of the biting winter winds of Petrograd and the appalling scarcity of fuel which made it impossible to heat any of the theatres, our Theatre of Foreign Comedy and other dramatic and operatic enterprises under the control of Madame Andreyva were in a most flourishing condition. The audiences sat wrapped up to the ears in fur coats, overcoats, blankets, and blew on their fingers to get some heat in them before they could risk the pain of applauding, but every part of the house was packed to listen to Shakespeare, Molière, Maeterlinck, Verhaeren, Goldoni, Schnitzler, and some adaptations from Dickens in which I lent a little hand. In the Opera House Chaliapin had lost none of his drawing power.



Mr. Blair showing two Bolsheviks how a bicycle should be dismantled to prevent its being used by the Red Army.

At first Madame Andreyva, always a staunch Communist, had proposed that the actors and singers should receive the same rations as the scene-shifters and stage-hands. Chaliapin, a giant of a man physically, accepted this proposal but announced that he would not sing ; he would earn his food alongside the other scene-shifters. He won the day, and flour, sugar and other things which the scene-shifters never saw were regularly handed over to him as a reward for every performance. Irma and I were sometimes invited by Andreyva to parties at Gorki's. It was one of the few houses which seemed to have been untouched by the revolution ; Maxim Gorki's collection of Oriental curios was still showing as proudly as ever. We met there quite a number of Bolshevik celebrities.

At Gorki's house, too, I heard all the stories that were in circulation about the big Commissars. They could be told there without risk of calling down the attention of a member of the Cheka. There was one I remember about Trotsky. Trotsky had a weakness for lying in bed of a morning, which was a great worry to his orderly, whose business it was to get him up in time for his whirl of engagements. The orderly had once been in the service of a Tsarist general with the same weakness and had found it a good plan to waken the general with a verse of the National Anthem, compelling him to rise to salute to it. He tried this on Trotsky and was nearly shot for it. "If you must sing, sing the International !" roared the angry Commissar. So next morning the orderly shook the Commissar's shoulder and bawled in his ear the verse from the Communist anthem beginning : "Arise, ye sluggards, from your slumbers !"


It was at Gorki's house that I met a part of my past again. The party on this occasion was a simple one, no big noises, only Gorki and Andreyva, Morosova, one or two other members of the theatre group, Irma and myself. We had been told there would be two other guests, a Red Army commander and his wife. The Gorkis were not very much interested in Red Army people, as a rule, but this particular commander was apparently an unusual type of soldier, even for the Red Army.

Some time earlier than this the Bolsheviks had become alarmed at the destruction of works of art, valuable furniture, and prized objects of all kinds which was going on all over the country, partly as a result of the fury and ignorance of peasants, who revenged themselves on their former masters by burning and pillaging all their goods, partly through the clashes of the civil war, and in the towns and cities through the contempt in which most of the new Communist and worker administrators held all manifestations of bourgeois pursuits and ideology. Some of the Commissars, such as Lunatcharsky, the Commissar of Education, were genuinely dis-

turbed about the loss to art and culture, others were more concerned over the destruction of something which might be bartered with foreign countries for manufactured goods or food. A commission was set up with Maxim Gorki at its head and given authority to collect these valuables and safeguard them for the State. The Red Army commander had written to Gorki offering his services to the commission on the strength of having had experience of the fine art trade, and since the commission was badly in need of a man with some *flair* for the work to travel as its representative among the local Soviets, Gorki had arranged for the officer to come and see him.

Gorki and I and another man were talking in an inner room when they arrived and the commander was brought straight into us. He was hardly the type I had expected to see, either as a Red Army officer or a connoisseur of the fine arts. He was a Jew, rather over the average height, full-faced, very broad-shouldered, well-fleshed all over, in fact, with oiled wavy black hair and strong-looking teeth touched here and there with glittering gold. He looked odd in his drab Red Army uniform as if he had assumed it for a joke. A well-cut morning coat with well-creased, striped trousers, a wing collar with a stock and a flashing diamond pin in it was the dress I mentally pictured him in, an elegant but energetic gambler on the Bourse or one of the more spectacular of the markets. But at the same time I could have imagined him stripped to the buff and smiling round on the spectators from a flood-lit boxing or wrestling ring. He was a personality, this fellow, a go-getter. He dominated the room the moment he entered it. One felt pushed back and weakened. The oddest thing of all was to find him in this Communist Russia, he was so unquestionably a born capitalist. One expected him to put his hand in his pocket and jingle his money from sheer joy of the feel of it.

The absurdity of this man's being a defender of the proletarian state was enhanced by his behaviour as soon as he was in the room. At the sight of Gorki's Indian treasures, among which we were sitting, his eyes shone, his teeth flashed in a broad smile of pleasure, and he rubbed his hands together in the traditional gesture of the Jew about to plunge himself into his native element. There was scarcely time for a big handshake for his host and a curt nod to the other two of us when he had the tall, stooping, melancholy moustached Gorki by the arm and was leading him round his own shelves and cabinets, crowing over this, valuing that, asking where this came from and what price was paid for it, in a flow of language that staggered with its raciness and its sharp assertion of the sale-room value of the masterpieces of craftsmanship by which we were surrounded.



We had been in a temple of the arts and he was stripping the haloes off everything, tossing them realistically aside and showing us the price-tickets. Gorki was bowled over. It was he who was accustomed to speak when this tour was being made, quietly, self-abasingly, collecting only the reflected glory of his ownership. This man was totting up the ledgers for him, making a little Croesus out of him, and for the intellectual doyen of the Workers' and Peasants' Republic, himself once a tramp and a labourer and now a high priest of the gospel of communal ownership, that was embarrassing.

When the inventory was over, Gorki, evidently a little confused by the unexpectedness of this stranger, turned the conversation to the war and his guest's experiences. There was no doubt of his qualifications as an appraiser of curios: the question that was obviously troubling Gorki was how good a Communist the fellow was. The question had not been asked, but the Jew sailed in to answer it as if the Soviet Republic were something he thought we might buy from him.

It appeared he had been engaged in the antique and fine art trade in the Near East before the war with headquarters in Smyrna from which he shipped the spoils of Asia Minor, chiefly to millionaires in America. He made no claim to having been a Marxian then. Caught in Odessa by the outbreak of the war, he had been detained while trying to get back to Smyrna and interned as a Turkish subject. To escape from the internment camp he claimed Russian citizenship because his parents had been born in Kieff, and was released to be drafted to his disgust into the Russian Army. Once he was in the army fighting had appealed to him, and he was one of the very few Jews who had been awarded the Cross of St. George for his bravery in bombing a machine-gun post.

Arrested for looting (he had made the mistake of casting an eye on some trinket already noted by an officer), he had been sentenced to a year's imprisonment, and it was while in prison that he had been converted to Marxism through the agency of a fellow-prisoner. The revolution had released him: he had become the chairman of a regimental committee: had formed a partisan band of his own, mostly of Jewish workers, on the borders of the Ukraine to fight the anti-Semitic nationalist peasantry, and when the Bolsheviki drove back the forces of the Ukrainian Rade had joined them with his band and won his way to an important command in the Red Army. Now that the fighting seemed to be coming to an end he wanted to serve the state in a civil capacity and was therefore offering his expert services in seeking out and valuing for the Workers' Republic the scattered possessions of the late gentry and plutocracy of Russia.


The praises which the man heaped on the Soviet system nauseated me, but they reassured Gorki, and he told his story with conviction. I could easily see him as the leader of a band of desperate young Jews, dispossessed themselves, taking advantage of the wild conditions to avenge themselves on the pogrom-making peasants of Ukrainia. There was plenty of room for the go-getter in the service of the Soviets. Heaven knew they needed a few of them.

He went on to tell us how he had met his wife, to whom he had been married three weeks. The Red Armies were fighting in the neighbourhood of the Black Sea, completing the mopping-up of the followers of General Denikin. The Whites were in full retreat in that quarter, but they would sometimes make a stand, usually with the object of destroying something, for now that they were losing hope of withholding any part of Russia from the Reds they were engaging in spasmodic outbursts of bitter destruction of both life and property.

There had been a halt of this sort outside a town, and while the main body of the Red Brigade engaged the White rearguard, Lepinsky, the Jew, had been sent to attack them on the flank, which they had left unprotected. The Reds had actually penetrated the outskirts of the town without meeting any of the enemy when their attention was drawn by an outburst of shrieking from one of the larger houses. They crept up to the wall and looked over into a courtyard, where they found about twenty White soldiers completely engrossed in violating the same number of women and girls whom they had tied down for that purpose to a long iron grating covering a stream which ran through the courtyard.

There was another girl tied to a post, and an officer with a monocle stuck in his eyes was turning her face forcibly to the sight of the mass violation and shouting to her over the noise of the other women that unless she submitted herself voluntarily to his desires he would deal with her in like manner himself and then hand her over to the tender attentions of each of his twenty soldiers. Lepinsky, who was within a couple of yards of the officer, shot him through the back, while his men covered the soldiers they had surprised on the ground, drove them into a corner away from the women and shot them all down. When Lepinsky released the girl from the post she had begged him so piteously to take her away with him that he had consented.

Her story was that she had been living with friends who were supporters of Denikin and under their influence she had acted as a nurse in a White Army hospital, but she had been so disgusted with the behaviour of the White soldiers and the White government's treatment of the common people in the territories it occupied that



she had begun to have Red sympathies, which had got her into trouble with the authorities and ended in her arrest as a spy. The women in the courtyard had all been arrested as wives, sweethearts, or relatives of men in the Red Army, and the White soldiers were making full use of them before leaving them for their menfolk to find them full of lead. But for the White officer's preferring a kind of moral persuasion to the sheer use of brute force, Lepinsky's bride would also have been on the grating before receiving the bullet which the exigencies of civil war had decided was her due.

Lepinsky spared none of the details in telling this lurid tale, and it seemed to me to be quite the most unromantic beginning to a love-match I had ever heard. But the lady had duly married her oiled and curled St. George and here they were. I gathered that his marriage had been a factor in deciding the Jew to give up his military career, so it looked as if he at least were genuinely fond. The story over, Gorki suggested that we join the ladies in the next room.

Gorki and the Jew went first. I hung behind for a moment to exchange an uncomplimentary comment regarding the new-comer with the other guest. I heard the voice of the Jew's wife, therefore, before I saw her. It pulled me up sharply in the middle of a laugh. But I was through the door-way before my mind could name to itself the shock that was filtering through it, gaping across the room, uncomprehending, unbelievably, at the ghost of Natasha.

I had barely time to assure myself that it was really she when Gorki turned to introduce us, the Jew standing possessively beside them. Seeing them together thus I realized that she must be his wife, about whom he had been telling us. She was older in appearance by several years, much more mature, but the anxiety of her civil war experiences had not hurt her looks. She was thinner, perhaps, and less shy-looking, as if something had happened to reinforce her and give her courage to look things and people more steadily in the face, but she was still Natasha, dark and beautiful.

She showed not a sign of embarrassment at meeting me. We looked at each other in silence for a few seconds, then she held out her hand quite calmly.

"I know Comrade Blair. We are old friends," she said.

Immediately all the women were around, Morosova, Irma with her large, questioning eyes, wanting to know where we had met, what we had known of each other.

I was still too stupefied by the encounter to be very coherent, but between us we managed to satisfy them roughly with the circumstances of our old acquaintance. Lepinsky interrupted as soon as he was decently able, looking as if he were jealous of any

limelight on her that did not include him also, and carried her off to form another circle with Andreyva and Gorki.

Throughout the rest of the night until the party broke up I could only look at her from a distance, and almost surreptitiously. I wanted to talk to her, to learn all that had happened to her, explain myself to her, but not before Irma and her husband. That was impossible. Nor did she show any desire, apparently, to talk to me.

I had hoped that the Jew might invite me to visit them, but he did not. On the way home Irma tackled me about Natasha. I had known for some time now that there was a wasp behind Irma's eyes, and in the succeeding weeks the subject of Natasha and my former relationship with her was a flower which she danced before herself to bring it out. Perhaps I gave her cause. I admit that this new Natasha was often in my thoughts. But we did not meet. No opportunity came my way. I knew that the Jew had got his job with Gorki and that Andreyva was giving Natasha a post as one of her organizers. But she had made no attempt to communicate with me, and I respected her apparent wish to be left alone. Nevertheless, her existence was a grievance with which the waspish Irma did not cease to plague me day and night. The situation was ripening past bearing-point when the Bolsheviks gave me my first opportunity to escape.

CHAPTER VII

LEPINSKY STEALS THE IMPERIAL JEWELS

IN the spring of 1920 the White government of North Russia, which had been maintained at Archangel with the help of British troops, was deserted by its allies and was ousted by the Reds. In the beginning of the same year the Allied Supreme Council abandoned its blockade of the Russian ports and the Bolsheviki were hopeful that they might soon be able to ease the situation at home with the help of some foreign trade. In preparation for this an order was issued for the return to Petrograd of a fleet of tugs transferred to Archangel by the Imperial Government when the closing of the Baltic by German submarines had rendered them of little use in their home port. The tugs had been taken north along the century-old Marinsky canal system which linked the Baltic *via* the Neva, Lake Ladoga, and Lake Onega with the River Dwina and the White Sea. It was now proposed that they should be brought back to Petrograd, not by the inland canal route, which lack of attention during the civil war years was believed to have rendered useless for this purpose, but by the sea route round the North Cape, down the coast of Norway, and into the Baltic again.

The order to arrange the transfer was passed to the Northern Commune Confiscation Commission. It seems a big jump from automobiles to sea-going tugs, but technically it was quite correct. During the occupation of Archangel by the British and the Whites the tugs had remained the property of their original owners, a firm of Petrograd stevedores. They were now to be confiscated by the Soviet Government, and as the terms of the Commission covered everything in the transport line except railways, the duty of superintending the confiscation quite properly fell to us, and the Moscow bureaucrats were sticklers for the nice points of red tape.

There was more in the manœuvre than met the eye, however. The owners of the tugs were two brothers, one of whom had escaped from Russia and was then living in London ; the other was still in Petrograd and was employed in a minor capacity by the local Soviet. The brothers were naturally anxious to save their property from falling into the hands of the Bolsheviki if they possibly could. They were already in touch with an agent of the underground sabotage


organization whose Moscow representative was Rak, and it was through him that the scheme involving the Confiscation Commission was evolved. I was to take charge of the confiscation arrangements myself and accompany the tugs on their voyage round the Scandinavian coast, but instead of bringing them to Petrograd I was to run them into Stockholm, where they would be claimed by the brother in London who would invoke the protection of international law. It was put to me by Rak's agent who broached the proposal that it would provide me with my own opportunity to escape.

I was not averse to the scheme. There would be difficulties, of course. The Bolsheviks were not likely to permit me to make a voyage into foreign waters with valuable property without a strong Communist guard. But means of circumventing the guard would have to be sought. I decided to go and I made up my mind to try to take Natasha with me.

My difficulty was to arrange a meeting with her. Her husband, Lepinsky, was still in Petrograd, having persuaded the commission of experts that he was of more use to them there than on the traveling work for which he had been originally engaged. But by an assiduous haunting, in all the time I could spare, of the streets between their home and Andreyva's headquarters, I was able to encounter her at last. We talked for an hour, wandering up and down a long street. The weather had turned cold although it was late spring, and there was a piercing wind.

She was shivering pitifully while we walked, but I was heartless. I had to persuade her while the opportunity was there. I came straight to the point. She was startled at first, but I knew from her refusal that she was alarmed at the prospect of my going away altogether. Although she had made no attempt to see me, there had evidently been some comfort for her in the fact that I was there. I asked her if she were happy with her husband. She said she could not leave him. He was kind and considerate after his own fashion. She had married him because she was alone and he had represented something she needed at that time and needed still—a human contact with the new system, the new ideas to which she was determined to orientate herself. I gathered that her marriage had been in some part a sacrament of the political faith which she was grasping, a marriage to Communism as much as to the Jew.

I told her she had seen nothing of the cruelties and miseries of the Reds. She was suffering merely from a violent reaction to her personal experience among the Whites. I argued that it was civil war and Russia. There were madmen and beasts on both sides. These things cancelled out, leaving the rights and wrongs of the real struggle untouched. But these had nothing now to do with us, I



told her. I loved her and I believed she still loved me. We had the chance now to get away from it all. I pleaded with her, holding her shivering in the wind. But it was useless. She begged me not to tear her in two. If I must go, then it were better so. But she could not.

We parted by the bridge where the body of Rasputin had been fished from the ice-bound river. Now the river was rushing swiftly, cruelly, full of the chilly melted snows, to the sea. The bitter wind had emptied the streets. Russia, Petrograd, seemed a thousand times more a desert, a waste-land that held nothing for me. I ran to my room, eager to be packed and away.

I had not forgotten Irma. Although our life together had been very strained and there had been frequent quarrels since the return of Natasha, I was still deeply grateful to her for the happy times we had had in the first months after we met, and I wanted to make the break with her leave no bitterness if I possibly could. It was impossible to tell her that I had no intention to return. The wasp in her was capable of rather violent rages in which she would have gone straight to the Cheka and told them the whole scheme—I had suffered once from a jealous woman already and could not face the risk again. I was loth to leave her in the lurch without some word of gratitude as a farewell, but it seemed it might be the easiest and kindest way out just to let her learn in due course that I had gone for good.

She forestalled me, however. On the night before I was due to leave we had a few friends to our room to bid me good-bye. So far as they were concerned, my absence was to be a couple of months. When they were gone she sat without a word, following me about with her eyes while I cleared up the dishes from the party. I asked her what she was thinking.

“That you will not come back here,” she replied.

I was startled.

“But why?”

“Because you are English. And because you don’t love me any more. Once you are away from Russia and think back on what our life is here, you will not want to return. You will find a way.”

I protested that even if I wanted to run away it would be impossible. I was afraid to encourage her in the idea.

“There is no need to deceive me. I don’t blame you if you are thinking of running away.”

I tried to reassure her, but without much conviction, perhaps. She remained aloof and withdrawn all night and in the morning we said good-bye without tears. I repeated that I must return. I was nervous of what she might do. But she just looked at me with unspoken reproach in her eyes.

There were delays in Archangel. I found there were only three of the boats fit to be moved. There were difficulties in securing crews. Accommodation had to be fitted for the Bolshevik guard, four soldiers to each boat, with a Cheka officer in command. I was rather worried how the plan was to be carried out. Nominally, I was in charge of the expedition, but the Chekist was there to see that my orders from the Government were properly executed. He was a dull-witted fellow, but of his loyalty to Communism there was no doubt. I had been depressed, too, to learn that Vidiakin, my old comrade of the Scarlet Pimpernel days in Petrograd, he of the clever pen who had gone to prison with me and K——, had been among the six hundred White officers whom the mad Chekist Kedroff had drowned together in a barge in the harbour when the Reds recaptured the town. It was another scar Russia was leaving on my soul. I got the news from his old father, whom I met in the street.

But at last everything was practically ready and I was expecting to be gone in two more days when the first blow fell. Natasha's husband, Lepinsky, appeared in Archangel. He had come on a flying mission from Gorki, he said, to give the local Soviet some instruction in the type of valuables it must preserve. I was not specially put out by his presence until he informed me that he intended to return to Petrograd by the tug-boats, too. From the close way he eyed me as he made this announcement I assumed that he must have some suspicions of the plan. If he did there could be two ideas in his mind. One was to circumvent it. But a word to the Cheka would have brought a hundred Red men at my throat. There was no need for him to come here for that. The other—and as I looked again at the man's grinning face with its compound of the bruiser and the banker Jew I felt it must be true—was that he also was aiming at escaping from Russia. He was another Rabinovitch. With how much gold were his pockets lined?

In the same flash with which I guessed this I saw I should attack, and swiftly. I had to get him under my thumb, not fall myself under his.

"Take you with me so that you can give us the slip and get out of Russia with all the loot that's stuck in your oily hair!" I shouted with all the power I could get up into my throat. "Not bloody likely, you thieving Yiddish radish!"

Radish was an insulting term which had come into use for those who had joined the Communist Party to feather their own nests—red outside, white inside. I was hoping we should be overheard. We were alone together in the room I was occupying. I thought if I could get an accusation of escaping in against him I should be

protected by having denounced him if he then made the charge against me. This would have been a measure of safety even had he been an honest Bolshevik. Jews were not very popular up Archangel way.

Lepinsky held out his hand.

"Shake, brother," he said. "I like you for that friendly act. It's just the sort of thing that I'd have done to you."

Then bawling at the top of his voice :

"Ha, ha, ha ! You imitation English Bolshevik ! Who's skedad-dling with the seat out of Lenin's pants—and the rump inside them—to make his mother a pin-cushion ? You are, you Christian automobile-faker ! I know you ! Let's drink to us, then. Brigands both !"

He hissed through his teeth :

"Have you anything that smells like spirits, supposing anybody does come ? Chuck this chair on the floor with a noise like that ! Now keep quiet."

We glared at each other in silence until it seemed that if anyone was intending to intervene in the pretended drunken brawl he was staging they should have arrived. But all was quiet. He replaced the chair on its legs and sat down.

"That was sweet of you to behave like that. Now, listen here, Comrade," he went on, smiling again, "supposing I do want to get away as you say I do. There's no harm done if I do admit it. If you say I said so, then I say I was playing a game with you to get the truth about yourself. See ? I'm a Party member and you're not. I've been in the Red Army and you've not. Maybe your record is not so clean ? I don't know. I just think you might sweat a bit if the Cheka got you on the grill. And I happen to have been told by someone who should know that when you go out on these boats you don't mean to come back. Isn't that right ?"

The only person I could think of who might have told him was Natasha, but that was unthinkable. I tried to fence with his own weapons.

"Well, if you're so anxious to get away, Comrade Lepinsky, it would seem you've got something up your sleeve you wouldn't much like the Cheka to pull down. Cheka bullets have bored holes in Party tickets before this—and Red Army jackets. Who told you you could be so sure I'm running away ?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"She should know. The woman you were living with. Irma."

I understood why she had been so quiet when I had left. But why had she told Lepinsky ? I had barely framed the question to myself when I had the answer.

"I'd be glad to know, too, when you're expecting my wife. You hadn't thought we might all be travelling together. Eh, comrade?"

It was plain enough why he was here. He believed I was running away with Natasha. Irma's jealous instinct had suggested the possibility to her and Lepinsky had acted on it without waiting to know whether his wife was really abandoning him or not. Or had he? It was possible he knew Natasha was not coming with me. In any case, he must know it was impossible for her to get to Archangel now before I was due to leave. Trains were irregular, infrequent, and taking days. All he had wanted was to seize the chance of making his own getaway, and this pretence that I was expecting her was only another whip to crack around my head. He was as dirty as they make them, this Lepinsky. I was angry. Fencing was over now.

"You're half right, Lepinsky. I did ask your wife to run away with me. But she refused. And I think you know it. You haven't come here to get her or to go with her. You're doing what she refused to do. You're running away from her. You're deserting her. And since that's the case, I'm going back. But before I go——"

He was a strong man with the body of a wrestler, but I was fit myself and knew a thing or two about fighting. I pitched myself across the table at him and got him by the throat. He was sitting, and went over with my rush, flat on the floor. The rickety chair cracked underneath him and he grabbed a piece of it, ramming it with all his strength into my stomach. I was winded and let go my hold and gave him the chance to kick me off him on to the floor. Before I could rise he was on his feet and jerking at his pocket. I threw myself at his legs but I was too late. He got his revolver out and cracked me with the butt end of it on the skull.

He watched me while I shook myself and felt the lump on my head.

"You'll be all right tomorrow, Comrade. Now let's have no more of this talk of going back to Petrograd. It's a chance we'll never have again, you and I, and you'll very likely be glad to have my help. I'm going to get that Cheka bloke of yours out of this and I'm going in his place. So just you keep your face shut and everything will be all right."

It seemed good advice in the circumstances and I obeyed. The following afternoon I was informed by the head of the local Cheka that the officer allotted to me had been withdrawn and that Comrade Lepinsky would accompany me in his place.

I have said that Lepinsky's arrival was the first blow to the scheme as it had been originally planned. The second fell within a couple of hours of our being due to sail. It was an instruction from Petro-

grad cancelling the sea trip and bidding me bring the tugs back by the same way as they had gone to Archangel, the inland way of the canals.

The message came by telegraph. There was no explanation for the change of route, only a curt command to proceed at once. I was on one of the tugs making our final preparations when it was handed to me, and Lepinsky was by my side. I handed him the telegram without comment. My heart had sunk straight to my boots when I read it. I felt sick with mortification and disappointment. There was no hope of escape now, at least with the tugs. It was heartbreaking to have the whole plan ruined at the last moment like this, when we were within an hour of sailing almost, with steam up and everything ready, the broad bay inviting us to the open sea. Lepinsky's reaction was a torrent of foul abuse. He went white as paper, his jaws trembled, and a foam appeared on his lips when he spoke.

"What do they know? What do you think they know? They can't do it. We've got to go! We've got to go, you hear? Tell them to set the engines going! It's my life. It's everything to me!"

His speech tailed off into an Oriental wail and he flopped down on a hatch, staring fish-eyed at the telegram in his hand. For a moment I was tempted to cut and run, too. But I knew it was useless. The soldiers were waiting on the shore to be brought out to the tugs and it would have been fatal to have attempted to go off without them. The Bolsheviks had several motor-boats armed with machine-guns in the harbour and could easily overtake us, even if the crews would have obeyed our orders when they discovered that we were running away. By this time the local Cheka would have had a copy of the telegram altering the sailing orders. We could do nothing but submit.

My own position was clear enough. All I had to do was to obey my new orders with the best grace I could call up. I was not much afraid that the plot to steal back the tugs had been discovered, since if it had the Cheka would surely have arrested me at once. I surmised that some suspicious-minded higher authority had considered it too dangerous yet to send the confiscated vessels by a route that led through foreign-controlled waters and that was all.

But Lepinsky's case was different. I could not imagine why he should face a journey back to Petrograd which might take months and lay through a very unattractive tract of forests and marshes sparsely inhabited, with the only possible avenue of escape a prolonged and dangerous dash into the Finnish waste-lands. It turned out, however, that he was desperate to be off, the prospect of a minute's delay sending him into a fever. When I decided after

consultation with the local people who knew the shallow rivers of these wild marsh-lands that the only way to make sure of getting the tugs through was to hoist them on to flat-bottomed barges, which meant a hold-up of several days while we got a suitable crane working, he was beside himself with funk and fury. I demanded to know his reasons for insisting on coming with me when he could so easily have got out of it. The whip-hand was mine now. I was determined not to be made a tool for the banditry of which I suspected him.

The Jew had lost his nerve altogether since the receipt of the telegram. Even his colour had scarcely come back and his hands were perpetually trembling. He eyed me suspiciously for a long time in silence before he seemed to make up his mind to answer. Hesitatingly he undid his tunic, pulled up his shirt, and let down his trousers. With another glance of suspicion he took a rupture-truss from around his middle and threw it on the table. Suddenly remembering, he stumbled across the room and bolted the door, placing himself against it with his trousers down to his knees and the tails of his flannel shirt hanging about him.

"What on earth have you got in there?" I asked, impressed by the sight of his scared face as he went through this performance.

He muttered so that I could scarcely hear him.

"Jewels—of the Tsar and the Tsarina."

I put out my hand to pick the belt up, but he intercepted me.

"Don't touch it! I can't open it. I can't show you. But they're there. Listen, comrade. I'll give you some if you help me get away with them. There's a million dollars there if we can only sell them to some people I know who'll know what to do with them. Help me, please. I want to get to America."

I whistled."

"So that's what you were so anxious to join up with Gorki for?"

He nodded.

"You dirty, lying, two-faced bastard!"

He threw out his hands in the familiar Jewish gesture.

"But why? Are they not stolen already? Is it stealing to steal from thieves?"

The manner and the sentiment both seemed contemptible to me.

"Well, I don't want a share in your loot and you can do with it what you like, but you're not bringing it anywhere near me. I'm not having any of the responsibility for these things hung round my neck. You can stay here or get back to Petrograd as you like, but you're damned well not coming with me!"

His face lost the small tinge of colour that had been returning to it. His hands remained as if suspended in the air, palms up, on

either side of his head. The Oriental wail to which he had given vent on the boat issued again from his lips, and I thought for a second that the bully, who had drowned my voice with his in this same room a few days before and overcome me in a fight by cracking me masterfully on the skull, was about to break into tears before me and beg for my pity. I was starting to walk out to avoid this spectacle, which would have been more than I could have borne, when he broke off moaning and called me back.

"Where are you going? Where are you going?"

"To the Cheka, of course," I answered. "I'm no Bolshevik, Lepinsky, but I'm not taking the risk of being shot alongside a Jewish thief."

With a desperate shuffle of his trouser-bound legs and fluttering shirt-tails he threw himself between me and the door again.

"You can't do that! You mustn't do that!" he screamed. "It's not only me they'll shoot. They'll shoot my wife, my Natasha, the Natasha you want. You can have her if you'll only help me get away. You don't want her to die or go to prison?"

It was a sight ludicrous beyond belief, this Jew, as tall as myself, broader and stouter, with a jowl on him accustomed to demand respect and a hand on the end of his arm that looked as if it might have smashed a face to pulp, cringing before me with his trousers down around his hairy shanks, clutching my coat, pleading for his life and loot, scuttering behind the petticoats of his wife. I pushed him back from me and he fell against the door.

"All right, Lepinsky, you win. If it's your only way out you can have it. But the sooner you take your leave of me the better I'll like it."

After this little bit of melodrama, the Jew remained calmer until we were able to take our departure.

The country through which we were to travel had only recently been pulled out of the clutches of civil war and was still being warred over by partisan bands whose respect for Bolshevik authority was slender in the extreme, so our cohort of guards was raised from twelve to thirty.

As a fighting force it was miserably small should we really meet with any human opposition, and I had serious doubts whether it was going to be large enough for the other job for which I wanted it, the man-handling of our enormous heavy tug-laden barges up the sluggish rivers, across clinging swamps, and through the weed-overgrown canals which constituted the road mapped out for us. For hauling-power we had been supplied with horses, and we had power to call in the assistance of the peasants on our route, but from the rather vague information I had been able to obtain regarding

its present navigability I was beginning to have grave misgivings of its practicability for us at all. In pre-war days the canal and river route had been kept with difficulty fairly clear, but it had been neglected very much during the war, and since the revolution not used at all, and the reports were that the rivers and canal stretches were full of mud and weeds and the swamps had reclaimed their own. Having collected all the gear I could think of which might be useful in any of the many emergencies I could see arising, we set off into the unknown.

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CHAPTER VIII

SATURNALIA IN A BATH-HOUSE

A JOURNEY through the Amazonian jungle could scarcely have been more arduous or more awe-inspiring than the weeks and months we spent in that great North Russian semi-Arctic waste, a desert of snow in the winter and in summer a vast plain of boggy moss-covered land broken by dense forests, reed-fringed lakes, and broad expanses of crawling river. With the immensity of sky making everything mean and worm-like below it, our little expedition had the sensation of marching into an unending void, struggling through a nightmare land that sucked us to it with each step we took and baffled our hardest efforts with its own interminable emptiness. The heat of the day played havoc with us, also the mosquitoes. Within ten days we had as many men sick. Still we fought our way on, dragging the loads with the horses on the river-banks wherever there was foothold for them and, when the ground became too marshy, sending the horses round by long detours while the barges were poled along and towed by chains from punts which the soldiers rowed for us.

Our first real troubles, apart from the sheer physical effort involved, were with the soldiers themselves. We had a mixed crowd, part local peasants, part workers from Archangel, and part Red Army men who had been drafted to the north from other districts to help resist the White and Allied encroachment.

The Archangel workers were the steadiest element. They were good Bolsheviks, for the most part, and willing to undergo some hardship at their new government's orders. The peasants resented being sent on a long journey away from their homes now that the war with the Whites was over, particularly since they were quite frank in stating that they had fought for the Bolsheviks only to get the Allied troops and the Whites out of the way and be given some peace, while the others, who did not belong to this part of the world at all and were really on their way to Petrograd to be sent home again, were festering with discontent at having been forced into this laborious and uncomfortable service which might take months when comrades of theirs were already safe at home after an easy journey by train. There was nothing of the self-sacrificing element of Com-

munism in these off-scourings of the revolutionary conflict. They were either plain riff-raff sent by the Bolsheviks to this less-important front because they could not be trusted elsewhere or deserters from the break-up of the Whites. Unable to desert again because of the difficulty of finding their way through the marshy waste-lands alone, they were constantly at tension with our peasants. Their one aim was to find a village where they might soak themselves in home-made liquor and rape the peasant girls, and while the peasants had no objection to these pursuits for themselves, they bitterly resented the strangers taking part in them on their home ground, as it were.

In these volcanic circumstances, Lepinsky, the ex-Red Army commander, came into his own again. I flattered myself I was not unequal to the task of bullying the malcontents along in my own way, but he obviously possessed a technique and an experience in that direction beside which my efforts were inept and puny.

During our first few days out of Archangel he had remained morose and jumpy, but as we penetrated deeper into the tundra out of the reach of the Cheka the natural bully in him revived, his colour came back, the haunted look disappeared from his eyes, and it was possible to see him recovering his confidence in himself piece by piece, literally feeling the strength of his arm, smashing his fist down on a wooden box to see it crumple up, raising his voice note by note in his orders to the men until it had become a roar, puffing his chest out, getting his swagger back. All this he did with an air of casualness which could not hide his deep anxiety. The man seemed really to be afraid that something had broken in him when fear of the Cheka had so completely unnerved him and to be doubtful of his own personality. It was all but possible to see him dodge behind a tree and rehearse himself in the act before essaying it in public in front of the soldiers and me. Like a music-hall tumbler who had been out of work and had lost confidence in his bones. But by the time trouble really developed it was he who cowed the riff-raff with his revolver and his fist, had the peasants writhing under the lash of his tongue which mercilessly exposed the laggards among them to the weapon they could least abide—the ridicule of their own friends—and transformed the ex-harbour workers with well-calculated doses of Communist exhortation into a veritable Praetorian Guard for both of us, leaving me free for the endless plotting and planning of how to get our hundred-ton burdens over the route.

It was he who saved the whole outfit from breaking up into three different murder gangs by disarming the least trustworthy of the soldiery. It was done by means of a skilfully staged loyalty-to-the-revolution purge, a manoeuvre of which Stalin himself might have been proud. A committee was elected for which the White Army

deserters were rigidly excluded from voting. This meant that it was composed entirely of the Archangel workers and the peasants, with the workers in the majority, and this committee agreed to the disarming of the non-local elements among the soldiers on the grounds (a) that their loyalty to the revolution had not yet been proved, and (b) that their looting and raping propensities were a danger to all concerned. The workers were delighted to be able to give play to the dispossessing impulses of the revolution even in the wilds, and the peasants were glad to be able to lord it over a caste made suddenly lower than themselves. The old principle of divide and rule had proved itself again.

My own mind was split badly between the worry of the job and my problem with the Jew. I could not help admiring his recovery from the nervous wreck he had been when he left Archangel, but I realized that he had tricked me during his exhibition in that condition. He had persuaded me to take him and his belt of stolen jewels on the trip as a protection for Natasha. But we had been three or four days out in the wilds before it dawned on me that Natasha was as much exposed to danger from the Cheka as if I had gone to them and denounced him. It only required the discovery of the theft to place us all in peril of our lives.

When I tackled him on this point the Jew declared that it might be months before the absence of these particular jewels from the collection was noticed, but the extremity of his own agitation in Archangel rather took away from my faith in this assurance. He had enough faith in it himself, however, or enough courage now to postpone his departure from us until we would reach the eastern shore of Lake Ladoga, where he proposed to make his way round the lake to the Finnish border, and again he pressed me to come with him. But I declined. I had made up my mind that the only way I could mitigate Natasha's suffering from the consequence of her husband's treachery was to part Jew and jewels somehow before we reached the lake and be the means, if I possibly could, of restoring them to their unrightful owners.

We reached the last lock on the canals, some fifteen miles from where the river Svir oozes into Lake Ladoga, before I had found an opportunity of putting my plan into execution. To tell the truth, I had not carried out the plan before because I had no idea how to do it short of murdering the Jew in cold blood. A rupture-truss was an impossible thing to remove single-handed from a living man of Lepinsky's strength against his will.

Altogether, forty-eight locks had been successfully negotiated with our heavily over-laden barges, in most cases after we had freed them of weeds and mud and got the rusted machinery to

work again, but this last lock proved the greatest obstacle of all. Belonging to an earlier date than the others, it had been built narrower than they and never widened, and we found it just too narrow to admit our White Sea barges through. Actually the barges could have been abandoned long before when we left the marsh-lands on entering Lake Onega, but without cranes there was no possibility of getting the barges off them again. We were still without cranes, still in the wilds, but it was obvious that the tugs would have to be separated from the barges if they were ever to go through the remaining lock. I decided to cut the wooden barges in two halves, draw them apart, and allow the tugs to float again on the water. We set to work with axes and hand-saws, the only tools we had available.

It was tough work, but we succeeded in persuading relays of peasants from a neighbouring village to stand in with us on an understanding that they could have the remains of the severed barges, and in a shorter time than I had hoped two of the tugs were floating. I was grateful to Lepinsky for sticking by me, for he was within a day's journey or less of the place where he had proposed to leave us and could easily have gone on alone, but when it became evident that the third barge, which was newer and better built than the others, was to be a lengthier proposition, he grew restive and told me he must go during the next night. I was desperate. I had still to get the belt off him and I could think of no way. I could, of course, have denounced him to the good Bolsheviks he had made among our party, but I boggled at this. I had lived day in and day out with the man all through the trip and, rogue though he was, he had been a tower of strength. I was unwilling to be the means now of his death. I made up my mind that I would stop him that way as a very last resort, but I must try something else first. There was only a matter of hours remaining. Somehow during this last evening I must part him from his belt.

I could think of only one way to get him to take it off his body. I must get him to sleep with a village girl. When it was too dark to work longer all our men had been sneaking off to the village, from which the peasants came who were helping us, but so far Lepinsky had shown no interest in their pastime and I thought it unlikely he would develop any at this late hour. There was no saying what he might not do if given the chance, however, so I asked him to go along with me to make some arrangements with the rich *kulak* who coveted the fitments of the remaining barge and was supplying the horses and labour for the next day's work on it. I had no definite plan. I was just hoping that something would happen, some dazzling houri rise from the fields with which I could play pandar to the

Jew's desires. No miracle took place at the *kulak's* house. The peasant overcame his aversion to Bolsheviks enough to treat us to some vodka, but that was all.

It was dark when we started back to the river. The *kulak's* house lay outside the village some distance and we had just begun to make our way down the road when in the dark we came upon three girls sitting on a gate. As what transpired may sound a little too good to be true I should explain that it is a common custom among the peasants of that part to give themselves a crude form of Turkish bath. That is to say, they steam themselves up to a high temperature in the bath-house and come out naked into the chill night air to cool down. The practice, is or used to be, common even quite close to Petrograd along the Finnish side of the Gulf of Finland. The peasants indulge in it even when there is snow on the ground.

This particular *kulak* and his family must have been rich enough to afford the luxury of a bath-house of their own, for the three girls who were sitting on the gate were as naked as they were born. We could hear them laughing and talking as we approached, but it was so dark that we were right on top of them before we saw them or they us. It was just possible at first in the darkness to distinguish their white skins. Almost as surprised as the girls themselves must have been, we stopped. There was no way of escape for them, unless by falling backwards over the gate, and they did the only thing they could in the circumstances—crossed their hands over their breasts and screamed. Our way lay through the gate, so it was impossible to pass on if we had wished.

In the surprise of the moment I had forgotten my plan, and my impulse was to stand aside to allow the girls to climb down. Not so Lepinsky. Placing a hand on either end of the gate he locked his great bulk close to them, holding them prisoners where they sat, and laughed up into their startled faces. Their screaming had not been loud enough to have been heard at the house, and when Lepinsky, holding them fast, began to talk, their protests quickly quietened down to a succession of nervous giggles. All three huddled close, partly in fear, partly in a feeble effort to shield their nakedness, but it was clear enough that they were not too embarrassed by the unconventionality of their position to get a pleasurable thrill out of it and to give an ear to what their captor was saying to them.

My own mind did not accustom itself immediately to the piquancy of the situation, and it was not until he had spoken for a minute or more that I realized he was urging them to take us back with them to the bath-house. He was pitching his voice on a low, tense-sounding note which the girls had to stop their giggling to hear, and addressing himself, a few words at a time, first to one,

then to another, with almost as much earnestness as if our very lives had depended on our getting into that bath-house before an enemy caught us up, and a solemn appeal to the reason and better nature of the girls was the only way to do the trick.

Having caught them in this unexpected manner, he turned quickly to raillery again and exploded his own joke. It was a perfect lesson in the art of woman-wheedling, and although the girls began by rejecting the proposal out of hand, when he let it be clear that the purpose of his eloquence was just a bit of sexy sport, their objections were not very firmly put. It was easy to see they were tickled with the idea of entertaining a couple of strangers in their bath-house, and after much nudging and giggling and whispering among themselves, during which their efforts to cover their bodies appreciably relaxed, plus another strained appeal and a few more attempts at badinage from Lepinsky, they gave way, and adjuring us not to make a noise in case their master, the old *kulak*, or his wife should be disturbed, they slipped down from the gate when Lepinsky made way for them and ran off into the darkness in the direction from which we had just come.

Lepinsky hastily pressed after them, with me in his wake, but their flitting ghost-forms went fast ahead of us, and when we reached the nearest of the outbuildings they had disappeared. Swearing under his breath, Lepinsky tiptoed round the buildings listening at each door. The sound of a suppressed giggle from behind one of them gave us the clue and Lepinsky crouched before it, whispering—each whisper growing louder and alternately plaintive and exasperated like someone calling in a cat and afraid of waking his neighbours—to the girls to let us in.

In another mood I should have laughed myself sick at Lepinsky huddled up there in front of a door and calling like a suburban cat-lover through a chink to the trio of young wantons inside, but it was uncanny to be standing there seeing one's half-formed wish turning into an opportunity so swiftly and generously before one's eyes, and I had a horrid feeling that I was about to muff my chance in whatever would transpire if the door should really open and let us in to the incredible luck that should be waiting for me on the other side.

Then over Lepinsky's wheedling-whining voice, when he was becoming really angry and would have shouted the next time, came the noise of a bolt being drawn back and a long bar of light, which Lepinsky's body immediately widened and obliterated, shone into the darkness and I followed him inside.

The room was a narrow rectangle with stone walls and floor. A paraffin-lamp hung from the ceiling. By the narrow end wall crouched our three girls now wrapped in some kind of cloaks or

coats which they clutched tightly round them. They seemed to be scared by their own daring. The only one who moved with confidence among us was Lepinsky, who entered with a loud swearing grumble at them for keeping us waiting outside. In the wall opposite the entrance was another door through which Lepinsky pushed. It led to the bath-house proper, the room we were in being an antechamber used for storing the bathers' clothes. Satisfied with his examination, Lepinsky came back and began stripping off his tunic and shirt with hearty enunciation of how fine it would be to have a steaming hot bath after so long in the wilds without one. He suggested, with a glance at the girls, that it would be nicer still to have something else beside, which set them off in a fit of nervous giggles again, clinging to each other and averting their heads.

Lepinsky stopped his undressing to demand that the girls come into the full glare of the lamplight to show themselves, and after much jollyng and a pull from Lepinsky they came. It was our first real view of their faces. The middle one, who was slightly taller than the others, had seemed least shy and it was she who turned out to be the most presentable of the three. She was by no means a beauty, but her features were a trifle more refined than those of her companions, who were nothing more than very ordinary plain, almost coarse, peasant girls. They all had a simpering, rather stupid grin, the look one would expect from sex-conscious cows, and I loathed them at sight. Lepinsky leered at the middle one but sniffed at the others, and none of us had any doubt about whom he had taken for his choice.

I was more interested in Lepinsky, however, than in the girls. I was wondering what he would do when he got down to that belt. He had barely started to undo his trousers when he seemed to recollect, checked himself, and retired into the other room. The girls stared at me and giggled and I looked around the room. There was no window in it, only the two doors, one out, one in. I was interested in the geography because I thought I might need a grip of it if my opportunity came. I had no idea how and when Lepinsky proposed to begin the intimacies which he was certain lay ahead, but the only plan I had been able to form was that I must dodge them somehow until he was well engrossed, get to the belt, and make away for the shelter of the camp. What would follow after that was on the knees of the gods.

Stark naked and grinning all over his face with anticipation, Lepinsky lumbered back into the room like a hairy ape and carefully deposited in a corner the bundle of his clothes. I had made no move with my own undressing yet and he demanded when I was going to begin. It hardly suited my purpose to undress if I intended to run

away with the belt which must be somewhere in the bundle Lepinsky had put in the corner, but there was no way to avoid making the pretence so I started to unbutton my tunic as slowly as I could.

"Let's have a dance!" shouted the naked Lepinsky and, humming a tune, grabbed the tall girl by the arm and tried to pull the coat off her bare shoulders. The fun was about to begin. But a frightened look came into the girl's face and she hurriedly suggested that we should first have something to eat and drink. The others piped up a chorus to the same effect and I added my voice. I wondered if it was possible to get Lepinsky drunk. The Jew grumbled a bit, but gave in. The question then arose: Who should go for the food, which had to be got from the kitchen of the farm?

Lepinsky suggested me, since I still had my clothes on, and when I had been carefully instructed how to find the kitchen and the food I stumbled out into the dark.

I groped my way to the farmhouse, which I was glad to find so far removed from the bath-house, found the kitchen, and with the aid of a tinder-lighter which the girls had given me procured the food and drink. Then I groped my way back. There was no light, no sign or sound of life anywhere. The *kulak* and his wife were evidently safely tucked up in bed.

I had practically reached the bath-house again when I heard muffled cries coming from the same direction. Lepinsky must be getting busy, I thought, and ran the last few steps.

I tried to push the door, but it refused to open. So close to the door I could hear screams quite loudly now, a full orchestra of them—all the girls must have been screaming together. There was a noise of light blows on wood, too, as if one of the girls were beating with her fists on a door. I hammered on the door with my own fist and called to Lepinsky, but the door did not open and I got no answer. The walls of the bath-house must have been extremely thick, for all the noises which were coming through to me sounded very faint and far away, but there was no question that something extraordinary was going on inside.

Whatever mischief Lepinsky was up to, I had to get inside because I wanted that belt. Dropping my burdens I groped round the house. I knew there was no window to the ante-chamber, but there might be one to the bath-house itself, and there was. I felt around it. It was not a window in the usual sense, only a large hole in the wall, shuttered with a board from the inside. I could hear the screams more distinctly now, so I judged they were coming from the bath-house itself and I banged furiously on the wooden board. The nearer screaming stopped, only one voice continued farther away. I had a heavy Colt revolver in the holster on my belt and I had

pulled it out with the intention of using it to try to hammer the window-board in, when the board was suddenly withdrawn and a light shone out on my face. The dark outline of one of the girls appeared in the hole, and on seeing me she screamed and ran back to another of the trio whose frightened face I could see in the lamp-light as she stood with her back against the closed inside door. There was no sign of the third, the tall one, or of Lepinsky.

I hoisted myself up through the hole and jumped down on the bath-house floor. The girls screamed when I came near them, momentarily drowning the cries coming from the other room. I pushed them aside and tried the door to the ante-chamber. It was locked. Gripping one of the terrified girls by the shoulder, I told her to be quiet, and asked her what had happened. I had been gone about ten minutes, she said brokenly, when Lepinsky, suddenly tiring of talking to them, had announced that he would have his bath. Glad of the interruption, the girls had accompanied him inside the room, but the Jew had pushed the tall one back into the ante-chamber, leaped back himself, and locked the door. Now Varvara, the tall one, was locked in there with him and he must be doing something terrible to her, judging by her screams.

I banged as hard as I could on the door and shouted :

"Lepinsky ! Lepinsky !"

There was no answer, only louder screams than ever from the girl and a mutter of cursing in Lepinsky's voice. I raised my foot and kicked at the door. The fastening must have been weak for it burst open at the second kick.

In the middle of the narrow floor stood Lepinsky, hunched like a wrestler, his eyes bulging, blood pouring down his chin and chest from his nose, his lips drawn back off his teeth in a vicious snarl, his hands clenching and unclenching convulsively. Naked as he was, it was a bestial, obscene, filthy sight.

The girl was on the floor in the corner, also without a stitch of covering on, her legs and arms outstretched in the attitude in which she had fallen, her hair hanging around her face, and her mouth wide open to emit the frenzied screams which her hysterical terror was forcing out of her. Her eyes stared wildly. She was in the first stages of a fit.

I dashed at Lepinsky and seized his arm.

"Stop it, Lepinsky ! Stop it !" I shouted.

He shook me off. Deep scratches ran down his face. The girl was strong. She must have torn and kicked at him with lunatic fury.

"Lepinsky, leave her alone !" I shouted again, pulling at his arm with my left hand to turn him round to me. My right hand still gripped my revolver which I had held in it since jumping into the

other room. "Don't you see you're driving her mad? You've got to leave her. You'll kill the girl. She's in hysterics. She'll be having a fit!"

For answer he turned half-round and punched me heavily on the jaw. I was knocked back against the door-post with a sickening crash. The room swam round. My knees quivered.

Behind me the watching girls yelled with terror. The girl on the floor yelled. The naked brute gave a loud roar that seemed to come all the way from his tormented vitals and split on his brain. He jumped clear across the room to the spread-eagled girl. I am sure the next instant he would have crushed her to a pulp. Murder would have been done.

Murder was done. Scarcely conscious of what I did, I lifted my right hand and pulled the trigger. The report of the gun shattered through the room. The lamp went out. In the last second of the light I had seen Lepinsky totter, but it seemed ages in the darkness before I heard his body fall.

A long time afterwards I remembered the flint in my pocket. The girl on the floor was still screaming automatically. The girls behind me were whimpering. I struck a light and found a stool in the bath-house on which I climbed to relight the lamp. Lepinsky's body lay in an obscene heap on the floor. The bullet had smashed his spine, just at the nape of the neck. I called to the girls to fetch water for their friend. Her eyes were wide open, her legs and arms kicking spasmodically, and her lungs pumping out horrible screams. Whimpering, they ran. We splashed the water over her. I have no idea what the proper medical treatment should have been, but after several doses the screaming quietened down to long body-racking sobs. I was sure the noise of the shot must have echoed for miles, but when I opened the door to the darkness everything was deathly quiet. The air was refreshingly cold. Telling the girls to stay with their friend until they thought she was well enough to be moved to her bed, I asked them to wash away the bloodstains from the floor with hot water and to say nothing of the events of the night to a soul. They promised. They were both of them now in tears. Then I gathered up Lepinsky's clothes, putting the fatal belt round me under my tunic, donned Lepinsky's trousers and tunic over my own to keep the bloodstains off them, and started the heavy task of half carrying, half dragging the body to the river. I sank it with the clothes tied round it among some reeds.

When I felt fit enough to talk I roused the firemen of the tugs and told them to get up steam in the boilers. I was abandoning the third tug to be salved later. By noon we were away. When they asked me about Lepinsky I said he had left us in the night on some business of the Cheka.

CHAPTER IX

AMERICA TO THE RESCUE

ALMOST the first thing I learned on arriving back in Petrograd was that the theft of those particular Imperial jewels had been discovered a fortnight before, but that Lepinsky had not been suspected owing to his absence in the wilderness with me.

I left it to Maxim Gorki to break the news of her husband's death to Natasha. I could not bear to appear before her as his murderer, even in circumstances which must have impressed her as an odd parallel to her meeting with him.

Besides, I was sick and in trouble. A malaria germ, caught in the marshes north of Lake Onega and lying dormant in a pocket of my blood, suddenly woke to its power to make my life a hell, and while I had been away my enemies had been at work. Scarcely had I set foot in Petrograd again before I was ordered to appear before a joint meeting of the Northern Commune transport committee and the automobile industry trade union to show cause why I should not be removed from the chairmanship of the Confiscation Commission on a charge of "hindering the development of Soviet industry by failing to maintain a sufficient standard of output in the automobile section". At first I believed someone had been totting up the tale of my sabotage activities and was staging a spectacular method of unmasking and denouncing me which would reflect to his own credit instead of merely carrying his information to the Cheka. On inquiring of Lange, who remained sympathetic, however, I learned there was another motive for the charge.

A wave of discontent with Communism had been developing among the masses while I had been slogging through the tundra. The civil wars were over. Soviet Russia had been victorious over its enemies. Kolchak was dead, Yudenitch had disappeared off the map entirely, Denikin had resigned his command to Wrangel, and he was cooped up with a fraction of the former Volunteer Army in the Crimea. While I was away there had been a short war with the Poles which had not ended too well for the Soviets, but the war had been fought on Polish soil and peace was now being made. And now that peace had come to their tortured land, the Bolsheviks were realizing that the alibi for all their shortcomings which had

kept them in power for the past two years had passed away. While there was a danger that the old landlords and employers of labour, the hated old possessing classes, might return, hunger and bitter privation had been secondary evils which the masses of Bolshevik sympathizers were willing to endure. But with the fear of re-conquest lifted from their minds, their bodies were beginning to cry out loud for the many necessities of life of which they had been deprived.

Since it was no longer possible to blame the wars and the Allied blockade, the people were beginning to question the efficacy of the Communist system itself. There had not been time yet for a wild outcry ; that was to come later. They were merely demanding how long it was to be before the things they required if they were to live, apart from the things they had been promised, were going to materialize. Non-Party supporters of the regime were asking the members of the Party, and these were nervously asking one another and their leaders.

But there were many good members of the Party, rank-and-file workers and trade unionists who had some knowledge of what was going on or not going on in the industries with which they were connected, who were becoming increasingly sceptical of the ability of Soviet industry to produce anything in any quantity at all under its present organization, and since they were unwilling as yet to attack the system itself they were eagerly seeking the scapegoats elsewhere. The pressure was coming from below and being directed, first of all, on those whose history or habits might lay them open to the charge of caring less for the people than they did for themselves. The "careerists" were under fire. And since some devil had to be found which the automobile industry could cleanse itself by casting out, and I was an Englishman, not a Party member, enjoying privileges of which many of the attackers were bitterly jealous, and was absent besides, it was not surprising that the witch-doctors had chosen me for the sacrifice.

I had arrived back in the nick of time. The meeting was postponed a week to enable me to answer the charge. The speaking was entirely to the point. It was in vain that I protested, as vigorously as my malaria would permit, that confiscation was not production and that it was unfair to tax me with the inability of the Soviet automobile industry to produce a single car when my job had been chiefly to rob their owners of all the old crocks surviving from another time. Kisseleff, who was present, spoke generously on my behalf, pointing to the assistance I had given him. Lange spoke for me, instancing the work I had just done in bringing the tugs from Archangel. Even silent Platonoff stopped staring at the ceiling and growled a laconic word in my favour. It was all useless. The hunt was up. That my

defenders were confined to those in the higher places sharpened the vehemence of the attack from the trade union side.

I was afraid to prolong the issue in case it might bring out by accident the charges which I was less prepared to face. I preferred to be given the air, as the Americans say, as a despised privilege-hunter than have the air let into me by Platonoff's revolver as a convicted *saboteur* and spy. The upshot of the meeting was that I was dismissed with ignominy from the chairmanship of the Confiscation Commission and the Cycle Races as well. Bolshevism had kicked me back.

The worst of it was that it had also kicked me out. The loss of my jobs meant the cancellation of my ration-tickets and the status which I had acquired with all the papers and passes, so important in Soviet Russia, which had belonged to it. I had suddenly become a masterless man, an outcast, and could now try to make a living either as a "hold-up" man, sleeping in disused buildings during the day and coming out after dark to demand with menaces money and rations from a population not one in a thousand of whom had anything to give, or as a bagman and speculator using my scanty possessions as the nucleus of a barter business and setting up in illegal trade. In either case I should be imprisoned or shot if I were caught. Even if I did nothing at all, without papers I was liable to be run in by the first Cheka policeman who chanced to stop me in the street. Without papers of some kind it was equally impossible to reach a frontier and attempt to escape.

My whole mind was set on escape. I had been thwarted in my attempt to escape as a somebody ; perhaps as a nobody I should fare better. There were three conditions which would require to be fulfilled, however. The first was that I should have to wait until my existence had been forgotten by those in any position of power ; I must get papers ; and, meanwhile, I must live.

I decided to appeal for a job to Madame Andreyva. It was not altogether an easy approach. It meant re-entering a rather small world which included in it both Natasha and Irma, both of whom I was anxious to avoid. Over that world still hung the mourning shadow of Lepinsky. At the same time, Andreyva herself had been my friend. She despised me because I was not a Communist, but I felt she would help me.

She fulfilled my highest expectations of her by securing for me a job as an actor in one of the propagandist films which were being made.

While I was engaged on this film I saw strikers again in the Petrograd streets and picked Bolshevik soldiers patrolling up and down to overawe them in the best Tsarist tradition. In spite of the

expurgation of the careerists and privilege-hunters, Communism had not yet been able to feed or clothe or warm its expectant millions and the millions were becoming angry. In the south, requisition-maddened peasants were in arms, murdering the requisitioners, pillaging the State farms. In March the sailors of Kronstadt rose in rebellion, fifteen thousand of them. The stage was all set for a Third Revolution. Petrograd's Commissars were scared and Zinovieff got ready his trains and cars for flight again. But the workers of Petrograd had just that much less in their stomachs than they had had four years before, enough to sap their old rage right out of them and leave them too listless to move. They had nothing left to fight for if Communism had failed.

A white-robed army crawled silently and invisibly over the ice to Kronstadt and took the sailor rebels by surprise. The sailors struggled valiantly with their attackers. It was the last stand for freedom in Russia. Makers of revolution, men who would have cut off their hands before they would have re-opened Russia to the forces of the right, were prepared to die by the bullet rather than be crushed in spineless idolatry under the inflexible march of the Communist god-machine. By the bullet they died. The rising was ruthlessly and bloodily suppressed.

But the old fox, Lenin, could read the signs of the times. He knew the hunger and misery in the land. He saw that the need was bread and all that unadulterated Communism was producing was bullets and stones. While the guns of the execution-squads were still echoing through the Kronstadt forts the edict relaxing the rigid machinery of war Communism was sent forth. Instead of being subjected to the total requisitioning of their grain the peasants were to pay a fixed tax in kind and the surplus was theirs to sell on the open market for what it would fetch. Private retail trade was legalized. Small industries could be privately owned. The march of the revolution was to be slowed down until the peasants could be induced to fall in behind. With the peasants, not over them, must Communism stride. Books, films, and radio must be substituted for the requisitioning parties' bayonets, tractors must pull the plough which fear could not drive. The peasant had revolted to win his Russian land. Well, Russia must win the peasants. Meanwhile, the Cheka would see that the aims of the revolution were not wholly forgotten. But if the revolution was to live, the people must live. A new phase in the development of the revolution had begun. The New Economic Policy had arrived.

Andreyva was good enough to find me a number of jobs about her theatres. I was behind the scenes on the night a special performance of *Othello* was put on in honour of the visit of H. G. Wells to

Bolshevik Russia. Andreyva had asked me to translate for Wells, but I had declined. This public appearance would have brought me back into the limelight again, and I was afraid that if Wells made any speeches I might be asked to translate sentiments which I could not endorse. It was much as I had foreseen. After the performance of *Othello*, Wells made a short speech in praise of the new freedom which the revolution had brought to Russia. Andreyva herself translated, and Yurieff, the giant actor who had played Othello, was asked to reply. He strode forward and gripped the little English author by the hand. His sense of humour—or pathos—must have got the better of him. His mouth opened, but all that issued forth was a great guffawing laugh. Again and again he tried, but could do nothing but laugh. Tubby, little, well-fed Wells shrank into himself dismayed, while the gaunt, half-starved actor towered above him and shrieked with tragic mirth. The audience understood and was silent. It was as harrowing a scene as any I witnessed.

I had one more little fling before I got away, a mildly comical one, one of the absurdities in which life in those early days in Soviet Russia was rich. During my acting for the Bolshevik films I had met a little Jew who had once owned a number of roller-skating palaces in Petrograd. They stood empty now, of course, but the hundreds of pairs of roller-skates which had been let out on hire were safely tucked away. If I had known about them I might have confiscated them for the Red Army and had a roller-skating brigade to my credit among its more exotic records. With the coming of the New Economic Policy, a number of private entertainment enterprises of various kinds had opened up, semi-legal cabaret shows and the like, and it occurred to me that the Jew's roller-skating business might be revived. Using some strings pulled for me by Chulkoff, Andreyva's silk-stockings-wearing secretary, I sought to obtain a permit for myself and the Jew to go into partnership. To our astonishment, Soviet officialdom took the proposal very seriously. Roller-skating had been a sport of the *bourgeoisie* in pre-war days. The workers should now have the benefit of this healthy exercise. Our little Nep business was appropriated forthwith and turned into a grandiose official enterprise. The Jew and I were not cast out. We were installed, willy-nilly, as Marshals of the Field (our official titles) and made fully responsible under the department of physical culture for organizing the new sport of the proletariat.

We started off with some success in Petrograd. The old palaces were opened again, the skates brought out and the floors repolished, and with considerable *éclat* specially instructed Red Army men, followed by a few workers, took the floor. Attempts to spread the pastime to other towns were a failure, however, owing to the

inability of the harassed engineering industry to supply us with more pairs of skates, and the scheme languished. Bureaucracy found other fun for itself and the masses.

Meanwhile, the dance of death from hunger and prolonged under-nourishment was still going dismally on in Soviet Russia despite the New Economic Policy, and the American Relief Administration, having fed the famished millions of Central Europe, offered to bring the surplus of the overflowing capitalist West to the rescue of the famine-stricken Communist East in the sacred name of charity, and in the equally sacred name of necessity Lenin accepted. I first learned that the Americans were coming to Russia from an officer of the militia, the body which had now taken over the duties of ordinary police.

One of the duties of this officer was to keep an eye on our biggest skating-rink, and I had bought his goodwill with an occasional free pass for his friends and a glass of vodka which I was sometimes able to obtain. By way of return, I suppose, Grigorieff invited me one morning when we had met in the street to step up with him to a near-by flat where he had a case to investigate. I thought his sense of gratitude was a little twisted when I discovered the nature of the case he had in hand. A man had actually been arrested on a charge of cannibalism. Of course, he was mad, driven insane by hunger, very probably, but it was symptomatic, was it not? This was my militia officer speaking. He was a Communist but an outspoken critic of the failure of the Government to provide the necessities of life for its masses.

I went along. The flat had obviously been at one time a luxury residence, but it was now as dirty, neglected, and empty as the majority of its kind in Petrograd. The occupant, a wild-eyed, unkempt creature of middle age, was guarded by two armed militia soldiers. His cheek-bones all but pierced the skin of his face. Cannibalism was evidently not a fattening diet. Grigorieff asked him a few questions which he seemed not to understand, then led the way to a back room where stood a large barrel with a lid held down by two broken cobble-stones. A soldier removed the lumps of stone and the lid and fished inside with a couple of sticks. Gingerly he lifted out of the brine which filled the barrel a grisly white pickled human hand from which a slice of flesh and the little finger had recently been cut off. Grigorieff spat on the floor and swore. It needed only sawdust underfoot to turn the place into a butcher's shop.

"Put the —— thing back and remove it to the police-station," he ordered. "The Americans had better come quick," he commented gruffly. He went on to tell me that the American Relief Administration was shortly setting up headquarters in Petrograd

from which they proposed to organize the feeding of the stricken populations of the Volga district.

This was exceedingly interesting news for me. If food was coming into Russia in large quantities from abroad there would be ships coming and going again in the ports, possibly in the port of Petrograd itself. There would also be American but English-speaking sailors and officials, friendly and adventurous fellows who would no doubt be prepared to take a risk in helping a fellow English-speaker, a victim of the Bolshevik oppression, to escape from this terrible land without having his history proved all over again, laying him open to being sent back to prison to serve the remainder of his indeterminate sentence for being a suspected counter-revolutionary spy. This was the fear that had kept me hanging on in Petrograd all those long months. But the militiaman's mention of this American Relief, with the pictures it called up of ships steaming out to sea and leaving Russia far behind, sent waves of excitement tingling through my veins. Somehow or other I must get a job with this new organization and use it, by hook or by crook, by fair means or foul, to effect my escape.

There was luck, too, for me in what he told me. The Commissar in charge was a kindly fellow whom I had known in the heyday of the Confiscation Commission. I had done him one or two good turns. Trembling inwardly in every cell of my body, I went to see him, confessed my mission to put roller-skates on the revolution was proving a bit of a fiasco, and was hardly my mark, anyhow, begged him to use me as an interpreter or in any other capacity he could think of. He was sympathetic and promised a job, but said I should have to wait. The Americans could not be in Petrograd for some time yet. I swallowed down my excitement as best I could and waited.

In due course the Americans arrived and were installed in the former offices of an insurance company in Morskaya Street. The Commissar sent for me to see Dr. Walker, the American boss of the show, and I got my job. I was appointed to Yamburg, a little town on the railway line near the Esthonian frontier, to check the contents of all wagons for the Relief Administration coming over the border.

A double responsibility attached to this new job of mine. Every parcel of food arriving at the station was opened in my presence, checked by me to accord with a list supplied, and sealed up again to proceed elsewhere. The purpose of my check was to exonerate the Esthonians of any charges of the pilfering which was annoying the relief organizers so much and fix the responsibility definitely on any Russians through whose hands the supplies should pass

later on. The Americans had been unwilling to trust a Communist official with this job, also the Bolsheviks had refused to submit to an all-American check. My appointment was the compromise. As a non-party man I could be shot at with impunity from both sides. The Bolsheviks took the precaution, however, of giving me a young Communist as an assistant. His job was to spy on me, but it was through him that I engineered my escape.

I had decided soon after my arrival at Yamburg that I would not be so foolish as to try to rush the Esthonian border. For one thing, it was extremely well patrolled. On top of that, Tarbun, my assistant, slept with me in the railway carriage which was our home and I was never long out of his sight. The only way out was to get back to Petrograd on a pretext which would take me on board one of those ships. I was helped to the plan by an Englishman, an official of a cold storage concern, whom I met going through Yamburg. He was on his way to Petrograd to arrange for frozen meat to be landed at that port by one of his company's ships, and when I learned his business I wrote him a hasty note of appeal which I slipped into a magazine lying on his carriage seat. The method of communication was highly dangerous for me, but it was my only chance and it worked. On his way back a week or two later he left the magazine with me, and inside it was my reply. If I could get to Petrograd in six weeks' time his company's ship would be prepared to take me on board.

But how to get to Petrograd? I decided finally to take the bull by the horns and just go. I would tell Tarbun some story about wishing to see Dr. Walker or the Commissar on some business and board a train. It was more difficult to conceal my absence from Yamburg from the knowledge of Petrograd, for reports bearing my signature had to be sent each day in duplicate to the Relief Administration and the Commissar's office. Could I induce Tarbun to send these in for me for a long enough period to enable me to get clear?

This Tarbun was a good fellow in his way, but he had two moods which I could not endure. In the first of these he got heavily drunk and invariably presented a revolver and threatened to blow off my head. I could deal with this mood by giving him a punch on the jaw. Once he touched the floor of our carriage he was all right. He lay there till he was sober again. In the other mood he was whiningly ambitious. He wanted to get on in the Soviet world but the Party had hitherto refused to recognize his merits. Why was he stuck here in a God-forsaken hole like Yamburg acting as understudy to a capitalist bootlicker like me? If it must be Yamburg, why couldn't he have my job? His unceasing complaint was that

AMERICAN RELIEF ADMINISTRATION
RUSSIAN UNIT.

Cablegrams & Telegrams:
"Childfund - Moscow".

Wm. N. Haskell,
Director in Russia

Morskaya 40,
Petrograd

27th March 1922
Subject

Series Set: 3

1 1922

TRAVEL ORDER NO. 12.

Mr. BAER, R. The Representative for the
American Relief Administration, in Leningrad, will proceed
on March 30th from Petrograd to Leningrad, in connection
with official duties of the American Relief Administration.

It is requested that all Civil and Military
authorities extend to the above named person every facility
of which he is in need without delay.

Very truly yours,

AMERICAN RELIEF ADMINISTRATION,

RUSSIAN UNIT, PETROGRAD DISTRICT

H. C. Walker
District Supervisor.

27/3/22

The pass given to Mr. Blair by the American Relief Administration which
enabled him to arrange his escape from Russia in the ice-chamber of a
British cold-storage vessel.

our job never even gave a chance to begin to show what he could do. For him it was a dead-end.

I determined to play on this grievance of his. I first developed an overwhelming nostalgia for Petrograd, telling Tarbun I was desperate to see a certain girl. I got his sympathy this way, for he was an incurable romantic himself. When I declared in a fake fit of love-sick melancholy that I had a good mind to go to Petrograd on the next train and plead with Dr. Walker personally to put me on his staff there, it was he who said why not? So far so good. I needed a stake in the adventure now for him. I found it ready-made in his desire to do my job.

"Supposing," I said to him, "I do go to Petrograd and am transferred or get the sack for leaving my post, are they likely to give the job to you straight away?"

He agreed that they were not.

"But supposing I were to stay away from the offices for two or three days and spend the time with my girl, and meanwhile everything is going smoothly and reports are coming in every day in my name. Supposing then they discover, or I tell them, that I haven't been at Yamburg for so many days, is it not likely they will say to me, 'But who has been doing your work so well at Yamburg all this time?' Would that not be the very proof they want of just how good this excellent fellow Tarbun is? It would be easy enough to arrange. All I have to do is to sign the forms in advance and leave them with you."

I could see the simple fellow was excited at the possibility.

"It's a very big risk for me, of course," I went on ruminatively, "and I don't know that I should take it. But if I don't, how are you ever going to prove to them what you can do? And if I don't sign the forms in advance, and you send one of them in in your own name, they'll have somebody else down here like a shot and my going away won't have helped you at all."

The simple fellow was pleading with me a few minutes later to carry it through. He was not quite so simple as to imagine that all I had to do was to walk in to Dr. Walker and inform him that I had deserted my post for several days and be given another job as a reward, but my future had absolutely nothing to do with him. All he wanted was my job. That there was any risk to himself never seemed to enter his mind and it was not for me to insinuate it.

When the time came I signed him ten forms, and he swore to say nothing about my absence to anybody until headquarters should communicate with him. We parted with many blessings on both sides.

My English friend had been generous in his help. He had even

arranged accommodation for me with a middle-aged woman who was more anti-Bolshevik than I. Here I was to wait until the ship was ready to sail and the sailor came who would guide me into the docks. Walking through Petrograd from the station to my lodging was an ordeal. I had been thoughtful enough to grow a beard in the last weeks at Yamburg, but I was twittering all over in case I should meet someone I knew. Later in the day, unable to sleep or rest for excitement, I came to the conclusion there was something I must do before I left Petrograd for ever.

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CHAPTER X

ESCAPE

It had been on my mind ever since I knew I was to make a real attempt to escape that I must see Natasha again and persuade her to come with me.

I had played with the thought often in Yamburg, not as something I had really made up my mind to do, more as a vague, lovely dream with which I was solacing myself for the acute realization I had that as a practical plan it was vain, foolish, and impossible even to contemplate. Now in this fever of waiting for my zero hour in Petrograd the dream pressed for its own realization and I knew it was impossible for me to leave Russia without a try.

I waited until nearly midnight. To the *dvornik* of the apartment house in which she lived I showed my Relief Administration pass, hoping he would have no need to remember me. She had been asleep and called through the door of the room before opening it to ask who was there. After I had answered there was a long silence. I knocked and called softly several times again, begging her to let me in. At length the door opened a little way and I was allowed to squeeze through. She had a coat over her night-dress but her feet were bare on the wooden floor, and her long dark hair, tied together by a strand of wool, hung down her back. Her face was tired and ill, but, dressed or undressed, that way the air of confidence and maturity I had seen in her at Gorki's was missing and she looked young and a little pathetic again, as she had used to look sometimes when we had met in the first days of the revolution, before she was sent away to the country and when she had been in a mood to worry over what was to become of all of us and particularly me. There was the same questioning, half-frightened, half-peevish expression on her face now and I was cheered by it. I had been afraid of the woman into which she had grown, but if I could keep her like this, like the undeveloped girl she had been when we first met, I felt it possible to win her to my will.

"Dorian, what has happened? Why have you come here?"

There was concern as well as alarm in her voice, in her eyes. I was heartened twice over and plunged urgently into my plea. When she realized what it was she turned her head away wearily

and sat down upon the bed. I knelt down beside her, took her hand, and pleaded with all the fervency I knew. I had come to her because of an itch that burned in my mind, a disturbing consciousness of a part of the drama of my life that threatened to remain unplayed and on which the curtain had to be rung down, whatever the *dénouement*, before I could go away. I had come to make my offer genuinely and sincerely, but as much out of a sense of duty to the fates that had brought us together, parted us, brought us together again and made me Lepinsky's slayer, as out of the deep feeling for her which I still believed existed in my mind. As I knelt there beside her, however, all the tenderness, all the desire I had ever felt for her, returned in an upsurging, melting wave. No dramatist's necessity was framing my words. They were speaking themselves unframed. I was speaking to nobody but her and speaking for nothing but myself.

She heard me out without a word or a movement of any kind. For a long time she sat and I waited for her to speak. Her eyes looked down at my face. Long ago she had looked at me like that when she had seemed to be drinking her fill of me, impressing every line and shade of me upon her mind. This was the old Natasha. I was afraid to disturb her, to break a spell which, if left unbroken, might end in the speaking of the words for which I wished. After a long time she moved. She pressed my hand and sighed. Then with a little smile, as to a child, she shook her head.

My heart cried with the sudden agony.

"No? But why?"

"I shall never leave Russia."

I was astonished.

"But why? We shall be living in England."

I spoke the word as if it were Paradise to think of. She shook her head again.

"England? Is it so much better in England?"

I sat up on the bed beside her.

"But, Natasha, think."

I spoke to her as if she were a child whom I was trying to persuade.

"Natasha, think of what England can give us—regular meals, plenty to eat, white bread, fresh meat every day, a comfortable house, wearable clothes, shoes that will keep out the rain, books to read, warm fires, and everywhere you go security and peace. That's England, Natasha, security and peace. Of course, I don't know what it's like since the war, but it can't be very different. England could never change. It's a friendly, kindly place to live in. Russia's so cold, miserable and cruel. Natasha, you've got to come."

I put my arm round her. She drew away and stood up.

"It's a pretty picture you draw, Comrade. But I'm a Communist, you know, member of the Party now."

I thought she was coquetting a little, but I was taking no chance. I caught her hand again.

"But you can give it up. They can't hurt you in England. You don't really believe in Communism? You've got more brains than that. How can this pack of crazy egotists, wind-bags, careerists, crooks and executioners ever run a country like Russia? Isn't Nep the first confession that Communism can't work? In another year there won't be any Bolsheviks. Come, Natasha, you'll be happy with me."

She seemed to be considering. She smiled down at me.

"Is everybody happy in England? Is there no hunger at all there, no woman unable to sleep at night for wondering what will become of her children?"

I pressed my lips to her hand.

"Of course there's some poverty everywhere, darling. But Communism won't remove it. And it's a drop in the ocean compared with the misery in Russia today. Listen, sweetheart, what have we to do with politics? We should think of ourselves. Come with me."

She drew her hand away.

"Those women of England whose husbands sell their labour when they can for bread—do they enjoy much of your serene English security and peace?"

"Bolshevik talk!"

"Of course it's Bolshevik talk! Haven't I told you I'm a Communist? Every woman who has a heart for anything but her family and herself must be a Communist. Besides, I have work to do here."

I was nettled that the Bolshevik virus seemed to have bitten so deeply into her veins. I lost my temper.

"What sort of work? Helping the Cheka to kill and torture decent people? Helping a gang of big and little Lepinskys to plunder——"

The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them.

"Oh, Natasha, I didn't mean to be so cruel. Forgive me for saying that. It has nothing to do with you."

She stopped me.

"There is nothing to forgive. That is how you see things here, that is all."

Neither of us spoke for a moment. Then she took my hand.

"Dorian, doesn't that show you how impossible it is for me to come to England with you? We are different people, you and I,

now, for ever perhaps. I am a Russian. I must live for Russia, this new Russia we are beginning to build."

She released her hand from mine and stroked my hair.

"You think I am mad to want to stay here, I know. You see this Russia you have lived in with us as a hideous shambles, a graveyard. The people are starving and have nothing that they want. Thousands have died, murdering each other, cruelly, bitterly. On our side they have starved and died for an idea—their belief that if the revolution can win through those who survive and their children will never know the meaning of hunger and want and economic struggle again. That may be madness but it's heroic. And the idea for which they have suffered and died will live. It must. I'm not making Bolshevik talk for you, dear, I mean it. And that's why I couldn't turn my back on it now, not even for your love. Now you must go. Your sailor may be waiting for you. I hope you get safely to England and I hope you will be happy—dear !"

* * * * *

But my sailor was not waiting for me when I returned to my lodging. I had to wait two more days before he came.

I was not long in getting ready. All I had to do was to fasten round my body inside my clothes the few photographs and papers, souvenirs of my experiences in Russia, which I wanted to preserve. My Relief Administration pass was tied up among them, and Ted, the sailor, handed me the faked House Committee paper which certified that I was working in the docks, and a dock pass. It was night, and for the last time I stumbled through Petrograd's ruins of streets, butting my toes on broken pavements and unearthed cobble-stones, stumbling into ice-covered pools which the remaining electric street-lamps did almost nothing to illumine. It was October and the night was murky and chill—good for the escape but bad for the escaper.

We boarded a rattling, clanging tram for the docks. My stomach was like water in any case, and as the tram swung and banged its way along the rails at forty miles an hour, without brakes, and with me shivering in the cold outside to avoid recognition, I lurched and heaved and went through all the sensations and motions of being sick without a thing to vomit. When the tram stopped about a hundred yards from the dock gate Ted and I got off and carefully approached. The pass was only to be used in an emergency and I had to slip through if I could. Ted went up to the soldier in the sentry-box and engaged him in conversation while I watched from the shelter of the wall. I saw Ted's hand fish into his hip-pocket and produce a bottle which he gave to the soldier. The soldier's

head disappeared for a moment into the box while his elbow rose and I was through. Stage one had been negotiated.

I was alone now and dodging in the almost pitch darkness through stacks of wood, coals, scrap-iron, and bales of rubbish. I made my way towards the timber basin in which the —— *Star* was lying. She was in mid-water. Crouching beside a timber-stack I listened to know if the coast was clear. There was no sound, hardly even a lap from the ice-filmed water. I took off my shoes, filled them with stones, and sank them close to the edge of the basin and slipped down into the water. The ice cracked like a pistol-shot. Breathlessly I clung to the side and waited. Nothing moved, nobody shouted, nobody came running. The icy water was numbing my body. Gently as I could I pushed off and swam.

With each stroke I took my fingers crashed on the thin ice, which ripped and tore like razor-blades at the half-frozen flesh. Jagged splinters of ice stabbed at my face. My feet seemed to be kicking themselves to shreds. At last the dark hulk of the —— *Star* loomed above me. Some shadowy figures moved along the rails overhead. I heard a low whistle, a hiss in the air, and a rope splashed into the water beside me. My frozen fingers refused to grip it. The rope was freezing hard, like a poker. It began to pull up. I gripped desperately. I was a foot out of the water when my fingers gave way. The rope shot up with a swish, tearing my hands, and down I plunged beneath the water. I gasped and fought for breath. The rope came down again and this time I forced myself to cling to it, not merely with my hands but with my teeth. I twined my legs round it when it began to haul. I hung on by sheer desperate will. The water gurgled behind me and I was drawn on board. Stage two was over.

Stage three was eluding the Bolshevik searchers who had to inspect every foot of the ship before it could leave. I was taken below, the blood washed off my face and hands, dressed in dry clothes and fed. When the look-out warned that the searchers were approaching I was hustled to the ship's cold chamber, draped round with white muslin, and stood in a corner between some quarters of frozen meat, the ship's provisions for the journey back. I was shivering from the immersion in the icy water, but the still cold air of the pitch-dark, empty chamber and the contact with the chilly carcasses on either side congealed me, mind, body and soul, like a great hand gripping round me in a dream. It seemed ages before I remembered I could breathe, but the breath I drew in was so cold it was like mustard on the roof of my mouth. The tears welled out of my eyes. I was so scared I should be frozen to death that I had momentarily forgotten the reason why I was there.

The door swung back with a clang and I heard voices.

"No light here?"

"No. Dynamo's off."

"Got a torch?"

"No."

"Get one, then."

A long, long pause in which I held my breath so long I feared my lungs would freeze stiff and I should never be able to breathe again.

"Here's the torch."

"Give it me."

Another interval in the midst of which a sensation of light passed slowly across the mummy-wrappings over my face.

"All right. Seal it up."

The door clanged.

Seal it up ! Good God in heaven ! That meant until Kronstadt was passed, and Kronstadt was six hours from Petrograd. Ted had told me that the refrigeration plant was not actually working and that the cold I should have to stand was only the normal low temperature of the chamber itself. But in six hours of that degree of cold I knew I should have been dead for a certainty. Terrified to disturb my wrappings in case the searchers should return, I was still standing, corpse-steady, key-taut and head up to the invisible freezing squad of executioners waiting for me in the Arctic darkness, when I heard a squeak of hinges, light shot across me, hands pulled at my muslin wrappings, and Ted the sailor's voice whispered :

"Quick ! Come this way. I've got a warmer spot for you till we get to Kronstadt."

The warmer spot was the ship's pantry. The Bolsheviks were unaware that the pantry had a door communicating with the cold chamber and had left it unsealed. Here I could lie hidden in warmth and help myself to food if I wanted it.

There was one more alarm. Ted had told me two of the searchers were accompanying the ship as far as Kronstadt and they chose to pay a visit to the pantry to have a bottle of the English beer which was kept there. I had no time to get back into the cold chamber. All Ted could manage was to tuck me into an empty crate, throw a sack over the lid and heave two sacks of potatoes alongside it, when the pantry door opened and the searchers and the ship's mate came through. More agony, cramp this time, the terrible fear that I might make an involuntary move, might sneeze. Conversation droned on above me. One of the Bolsheviks sat on my crate. Glasses clinked. Bolsheviks laughed at stupid jokes of English sailors trying to talk Russian. English sailors laughed at

Bolsheviks trying to talk English. Long, awkward pauses in which nobody talked and the only sounds were their breathing and my beating heart. But eventually the boundary was signalled and they all shuffled out to see the Bolsheviks off in the launch.

Ted led me on to the deck to have a last look at Russia before we headed for open sea. We waved our hands derisively to the Bolshevik launch already lost in the misty grey twilight of the new day. I was saying good-bye to nine years of my life.

There was no sun-up visible that morning, and it seemed appropriate somehow. Sentimental always, I stood by the rail, shivering in the cold air, giving a good-bye thought to the characters I had known in that eventful nine-year play. It was their curtain-call and they pressed forward to take it.

Chaplinsky, Tarzan in Savile Row clothes, my introducer to the Secret Service ; Colonel Rakunadze, unmasker of the traitor Mayasoyedoff, enemy of Rasputin, inventor of the plot which, but for Prince Youssoupoff's untimely murder of the *staretz*, might have made possible a democratic regime in Russia and given that country another history ; the pathetic weakling autocrat, Tsar Nicholas, and his tragically inflexible, proud, stupid counsellor, the Tsarina ; stalking close behind them, blue-shirted, velvet-trouserred, oiled and scented, Rasputin himself, hand upraised to give me blessing but dropped immediately to curse me for the injury I did to his body which has condemned him to wander in the outer darkness for ever, deprived of his place in heaven and robbed of his sainthood ; Napoleon in a frock-coat, the pale Kerensky, shouting again his fatal refusal to arrest Lenin and the leaders of the Bolsheviks ; Lenin himself, a burly little man in a flat cap, raising a confident hand to quiet the cheering crowds that fought to hear him speak from the balcony of the house of the Tsar's ex-dancer-mistress ; the once gay K——, my comrade, sadly turning his face away from me so that I should not be reminded too poignantly of the night when I saw it shot to pieces by the mob in the courtyard of a Bolshevik prison ; Dzerjinsky, feared overlord of the Cheka, grimly contemplating me through his lidless, unwinking serpent-like eyes, still jingling in his open hand those bullets with which he tried to terrify me into telling him what I knew of the intervention plans being fostered by the British Government ; Rook, Rabinovitch, and Lepinsky, the assorted trio of accomplished Hebrew buccaneers —Rook with a jewel from Lepinsky's haul shining in the middle of the giant blackhead on his great hook nose, Rabinovitch suave, Lepinsky naked and obscene ; Kisseleff and Blagonravoff, the good Bolsheviks ; cowardly Zinovieff with his bags packed ready for flight at the first smell of danger ; Maxim Gorki lovingly surveying

his room of Indian treasures while Russia starved ; Trotsky flashing to the rescue of Petrograd when we had done our best to deliver it into the hands of the Whites, thinking aloud as he came : “Whence can they expect a blow ? From the window ? From the attic ? From the cellar ? . . . It is only necessary that some thousands of men should firmly decide not to give up Petrograd” ; last of all, Natasha, as I had seen her last in her night-gown and with her hair hanging down her back, declaring firmly : “The idea for which these millions starved and died shall live ! It must !”

I wondered.

Ted touched me on the arm. Breakfast was ready. I hurried below.

THE END

